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ALL ABOUT SHAKESPEARE



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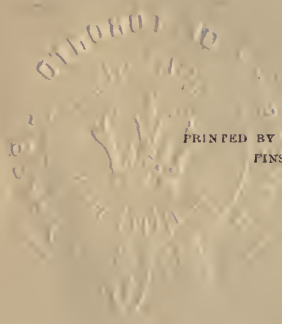
IN COMMEMORATION OF THE TER-CENTENARY.

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ALL ABOUT SHAKESPEARE.

For the first time in history, England is about to commemorate the birth of a grand national poet—a graceful return, it will be allowed, on the part of the age of Victoria, for the rich legacy bequeathed to it by the age of Elizabeth—not that Englishmen are insensible to the claims of the great inspired, but that all former attempts to wreathe the brow of the Stratford woolstapler's son, have partaken, more or less, of a local character, and been confined to the town in which he was born and buried.

The English have ever had a passion for *dining* in public, on all possible occasions, great or small; it may well be understood, therefore, that our greatest poet's birthday could not pass over without recognition by those who assemble to feast, and make speeches over their wine: consequently, there have been anniversary dinners to his memory in taverns and public rooms—by stray knots of men in spots and places far apart, in time, as in locality—by literary clubs in Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, and other large towns; by similar societies in London, so far back as the Shakesperian dinners at the Old Boar's Head, Eastcheap, to that more recent one of the Urban Club at St. John's Gate, Clerkenwell, where the present movement for the erection of a tercentenary monu-

ment was inaugurated: but no other public demonstration can be said to have taken place, which had not its rise in Stratford.

The first Shakespeare jubilee took place in 1769, and was the direct inspiration, less of the enthusiasm, than the vanity, of David Garrick, who, having received some personal compliment from the cunning burghers, resolved to compound for it by a



STRATFORD CHURCH, AND THE AVON.

three days' festival, he himself officiating as the presiding genius. There was a procession of a most stately description; an oratorio in which many celebrated artistes of the day bore a part; a series of dramatic performances in an amphitheatre erected for the purpose; a very brilliant display of fireworks; and to these would have been added a histrionic pageant, but the elements, wind and rain, pouring out all the vials of their wrath during the entire three days, it was struck out of the



SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE IN HENLEY STREET.

programme, but subsequently transferred to the boards of old Drury, where David turned it to *capital* account.

The next festival was projected by the Stratford Shakespeare Club, and was held in 1827, partaking very much of the character of its predecessor; and in the year 1830, the same club (designing to make these celebrations triennial, after the fashion of the Lady Godiva procession, in the neighbouring city of Coventry) produced a third affair of the kind, including a theatrical pageant, which extended over four days. No further public demonstrations in honour of the Bard of Avon occurred until April 23rd, 1853, when a party of enthusiastic Shakesperians from Birmingham commemorated the 289th anniversary of the supposed day of the poet's birth as reverent pilgrims to a sacred shrine.

We say the *supposed* day of his birth, for the register in Stratford Church, which runs thus, "April 26th, 1564, Gulielmus fillius Johannes Shakespeare," is that of baptism, not birth, although the 23rd of April, the festival of the patron saint of England, has come by common consent to be regarded as that on which he first drew breath at the old house in Henley-street, then a substantial dwelling, but some years afterwards converted into two separate tenements, as now represented in all prints—one half generally showing as a butcher's shop.

It is as Washington Irving truly describes it, a small, mean-looking edifice, of plaster and wood—a true nestling-place for genius, which seems to delight in hatching its offspring in bye-corners. The walls of its meagre chambers are covered with names and inscriptions in every language, being the silent testimony to the memory and genius of the Poet, of those who have made a pilgrimage to his shrine. Shakespeare's father, in 1574, gave £40 for this and another house. On his death, they became the property of his eldest son, William, who bequeathed them, in turn, to his sister,

Joan Hart, "for the term of her natural life." At her demise, which took place in 1646, the tenements came into the possession of Lady Barnard, who left them to the sons of Joan Shakespeare Hart. In 1806, the houses were sold for £250; and subsequently, that in which the poet was born, was exhibited by one Mary Hornby, a descendant of the family, who rented it in the first instance at £10; but the



ROOM IN WHICH SHAKESPEARE WAS BORN.

proprietor, finding the number of visitors rapidly increasing, and a growing interest taken in the dear old pile, sought occasion to raise the rent to £40, a sum much too large for Dame Hornby to pay. She thereupon left it, not without a sigh, for she had become greatly attached to the place, nor without carrying with her all those relics described by the author of "Bracebridge Hall," in his inimitable "Sketch Book." The house was, however, kept on as an exhibition, until the 16th of September, 1847, when it was put up for sale by the well-known "George Robins of auction renown." Mr. Peter Cunningham, on behalf of a committee formed in London, for the purpose of securing its purchase, offered

£3,000 for it, and at that price it became the property of the nation for all time to come.

It teaches a deep and solemn lesson of humility, to reflect that, not in the halls of the learned, or in the mansions of the great, but in this quaint low-browed cot, before which kings have bowed themselves, the foremost Englishman was born; that not in proud capitals, or imperial cities, but in a quiet country town, now the envy of the world, the mightiest intellect of Europe was nurtured. Here, in addition to the birthplace, purchased and preserved by subscriptions from every quarter of the globe, is the rude wayside school where he acquired his "little Latin and less Greek;" here, too, may be seen New-place—the site of his residence, after his return from the applause of courts to the tranquil meadows watered by his favourite stream—the spots where the mulberry, planted by his own hand, and the old Gospel elm grew—the pleasant village of Shottery, where he wooed and won his wife, Anne Hathaway; and lastly, the grand old church where "after life's fitful fever he sleeps well." The town, the neighbourhood, and all connected with it, literally breathes of our poet in language eloquent, albeit inaudible.

During the poet's early days, his father, Master John Shakespeare, was a prosperous woolstapler; but, the trade of the district decaying, his fortune declined, and his son William was in consequence withdrawn from school, to render assistance at home to his parent, who had now recourse to the business of a butcher.

It was not long, however, before courtship interfered with "calf-killing," as being more in unison with young Will Shakespeare's feelings and character. The extreme, though mature beauty of Anne Hathaway (for she was eight years his senior), captivated his youthful fancy, and we can readily picture him to ourselves, "in his habit as he lived," traversing "many a time and oft" with impatient feet, the short mile

between Stratford and Shottery, to sit beside the fair owner of the "middle cottage of the three," on the "courting stool," or chair, since removed by the hand of the relic hunter.

He "married in haste," at the unripe age of eighteen, and it is said, though with scant reason, that he "repented at leisure."

In the following year, "unto him a child was born," his daughter Susannah; and in eighteen months afterwards, followed a twin boy and girl, Hammet and Judith, so that ere manhood arrived, Shakespeare had a wife and three children to provide for; and to do this he became a schoolmaster.



ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE AT SHOTTERY.

It was about this time that he is said to have "fallen into ill-company," and "dissolute habits," of which, his alleged drinking bout at Bidford, his drunken sleep under the road-side crab-tree, and his memorable fracas with Sir Thomas

Lucy, of Charlicote, were but the ripe fruits. But the Apostle of Temperance, it must be remembered, had not then arisen. Excess was scarcely a crime; and the game-laws did not exist until the Puritan magistrate, whom Shakespeare has spitted for ever on the point of his pen, pressed forward to frame them.



CHARLICOTE.

He who in his writings has shown such a wondrous love of the great principles of justice, was just the man above all others to resist the infringement of a public right; precisely as Sir Thomas Lucy was the man above all others to resent the infringement of a private one. In the spirit of "bold Robin Hood, the forester good," Shakespeare is said to have lent a hand in carrying off a head of deer. Detection followed—the man was prosecuted, and the poet made. Shakespeare retaliated at the time, in the well-known doggerel (the authenticity of which is questioned however) in which he sings:—

"If Lucy is Lowsie, as some volke miscall it,
Singe Lowsie Lucy whatever befall it:"

But he, also, retaliated again more severely many years afterwards, when he drew with his inimitable pen the life-like portrait of Justice Shallow.

Whether Shakespeare "ran his native town" from persecution abroad, or strife and poverty at home, is uncertain; but it is certain that, as Aubrey states, "this William being naturally inclined to poetry and acting, came to London." He is supposed, when not more than seven years of age, to have beheld a play in dumb show, entitled, "The Cradle of Security;" when only eleven, the Earl of Leicester entertained "Good Queen Bess," at his sumptuous palace at Kenilworth; and Shakespeare's sire, then a substantial yeoman,



KENILWORTH CASTLE.

and an Alderman of Stratford, may be assumed to have taken his little Will to witness the pageant. Three distinct companies of players had, moreover, visited Stratford, during his

youth—and as three of these players—Heminge, Burbage, and Green, were Warwickshire, if not Stratford, men, there was no lack of inducement to abandon the life of a rustic, and cast his lot with them.

Arrived in "town," he appears to have at once attached himself, in a curious capacity, to the Globe and Blackfriars theatres. At first, if tradition be true, he was but a hanger-on at the theatre door, as horse-boy; then call-boy; but after his introduction within the play-house by one or other of the players already referred to, his own talents secured his rapid progress—first as an actor, then as a playwright.



THE GLOBE THEATRE.

The Queen, despite the opposition of the Puritans, had granted license to the players to exercise their art, and from that time the number of theatres increased. The Globe,

Bankside, and Blackfriars theatres, were all the property of the company which Shakespeare joined, and by whom his dramas were represented. The Globe was a wooden building, hexagonal in form, partially roofed only, and thatched with rushes. This was the summer theatre for day performances, which commenced at three o'clock in the afternoon. It was called the "Globe" from its sign, which was a figure of Atlas supporting the globe, under which was written "*Totus mundus agit histrionem;*" (All the world acts a play). This theatre was burned down on St. Peter's Day, June 29, 1613, through a somewhat remarkable accident. During the performance of a play called *All is True*, King Henry VIII. was represented as giving a masque at Cardinal Wolsey's house, and during its progress, on the entrance of the King, cannons were fired off. Unfortunately, the paper or wadding of one of these lodged on the dry roof of reeds, and being unobserved by either actors or spectators, both intent on the performance, from a smoke it kindled to a flame, and circled the place like a train, consuming the old wooden edifice in less than an hour. It is worthy of note, that notwithstanding the crowded state of the theatre, and the narrow doors, no person was injured; one man's nether garments certainly were set on fire, but a bottle of ale is said to have done duty as a fire engine, and saved the man's skin. Had people more presence of mind in those days than in these?

Ben Jonson is supposed to have been present at the fire.

The Blackfriars Theatre (situated near the present Apothecaries' Hall, the site still preserved as Playhouse-yard), was entirely covered in, and the performances took place by candle-light. The stage, at that time, was little more than a rude platform, scenes and properties being few and simple; the actor then had no aid from "sensational" effects, nor, on the other hand, was his art subordinated to stage upholstery. The more distinguished guests were accommodated

with seats on the stage, which was strewn with rushes, while the ordinary spectators sat in a gallery around the area, or stood on the ground beneath; hence the term "*groundlings*," as used by Hamlet, when he advises the players not to "tear a passion to tatters, to split the ears of the groundlings." Education had not in Shakespeare's time a very wide range; the nobility, gentry, and some few of the upper-class tradespeople might have had instruction of one kind or other, but to the mass of the people the very alphabet was a mystery; so that the "groundlings" were intellectually far beneath the "gods" of even our minor theatres. No wonder, then, that these rude mobs would frequently clamour and riot when buffoonery, ribaldry, or rant were not sufficiently pungent for their strong palates, and call for what plays they pleased; compelling the actors to alter the programme at bidding. It not unfrequently happened, on such occasions, that swords and staves were drawn, and blood shed, or that the rioters, when satiated with the horrors or obscenity they had importunately demanded in the theatre, rushed to the Bear Garden, on Bankside, to end the day with bear-baiting or worse. The Phœnix Theatre, in Drury-lane, was pulled down by just such a mob in the reign of James I.

It was customary, on days of performance, to hoist a flag on the front of a theatre. The prices of admission were, to the best places, a shilling; to the ground (or, as we moderns say, the "promenade"), a penny or two pence; but these charges were not so low as they sound to our ears, money having a different relative value. The critics sat with the nobles on the stage, and were furnished with pipes and tobacco. The curtain (generally suspended from the edge of the balcony or gallery) was not rolled up, but drawn back on each side, not to reveal scenes, but admit the players to the open platform. The deficiency of scenes, there being seldom

more than one, if any, was supplied by the names of places being written on a moveable board, and placed conspicuously at the back of the stage; for instance, a garden, a ship, Thebes, Rome, or Venice, as the case might be. The stage was lighted by candles in branches, as in churches, and also by footlights as now. Before the performance commenced, three flourishes, or pieces of music, were played; and music was likewise played between the acts, the instruments being chiefly trumpets, cornets, and hautboys. Wigs and masks formed part of the stage properties, and the female parts for the first hundred years were represented by young men.

The audience, before the entrance of the actors, amused themselves with reading or playing at cards; while others drank ale or smoked tobacco, as in the singing saloons now.

For some time plays were acted on Sundays only; after 1579, they were acted on Sundays and other days indiscriminately.

The Belle Sauvage Yard, Ludgate-hill, and the Old Tabard, Southwark, were among the most famous of the many Inn-yard theatres. We give an illustration of the latter celebrated hostelry, the rendezvous of Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims, which even now exists intact.

Although there were several other theatres in London in Shakespeare's time, the Fortune, in Whitecross-street, and the Red Bull, Clerkenwell, alone deserve mention—the one as the oldest of English playhouses—the other as the only one whose site now retains a temple dedicated to the dramatic muse—viz., that of Sadler's Wells.

The Fortune was originally appointed for the nursery of the children of Henry VIII., and afterwards converted into a theatre, and partially rebuilt by Alleyn the player, the founder of Dulwich College, who was also proprietor of the Bear Garden. It was originally a round brick building, of vast dimensions, as may be understood when it was advertised

for sale as a space "for twenty-three tenements with gardens, and a street cut through." This theatre shared the fate of the Globe, being burned down to the ground in two hours one Sunday night in December, 1621, through some negligence with a candle, and all the *books*, dresses, and other properties of the players consumed: whereby it is said—"These poore companions are quite undone."

Sadlers' Wells, the scion of the Red Bull Theatre, has not only conserved the site of a stage where Shakespeare trod, but



THE TABARD INN, SOUTHWARK.

preserved a home for the king of dramatists, a Cordelia who opened her tent to him when the Goneril and Regan of Drury-lane and Covent-garden drove him away. Under the *régime* of Mr. Phelps, and later of Miss Marriott, Shakespeare

has reigned here undisputed, where, though the throne be small, his subjects are many and loyal.

As an actor Shakespeare was not great. Whether his lameness, or his modesty, or distaste, restrained him from assuming any prominent part, is a matter of question. He is known to have played the Ghost in "Hamlet," but no principal character. There was no lack, however, of good performers to sustain the leading parts: Richard Burbage,



RICHARD BURBAGE.

John Heminge, Augustine Phillips, William Kemp (the original Dogberry), Henry Condell, William Sly, Richard Cowley, John Lowin, Alexander Cooke (the *heroine* of the stage), Robert Armin, Nathaniel Field, Joseph Taylor (instructed to play Hamlet by Shakespeare), and the lesser lights, such as, Laurence Fletcher, Edmond Shakespeare (the poet's brother), Thomas Pope, George Bryan, Samuel Cross, Samuel Gilburne, William Ostler, John Underwood, Nicholas Tooley, William Ecclestone, Robert Benfield, Robert Goughe, Richard Robinson, John Shancke, Richard Perkins, and John Rice, were all actors in Shakespeare's dramas.

Had our poet been an actor only, he would never have become opulent, and been enabled, as he was, to go down to Stratford once every year, to visit his family, keep warm old friendships and associations, and enjoy the perfumed air and natural beauties of the place. As an author, writing for bread, and for the necessities of the stage, when it was very different to what it now is, and as a theatrical proprietor, he



NATHANIEL FIELD.

in time acquired, not merely a handsome competency, but the countenance, the friendship, and the esteem of powerful patrons. The Earl of Southampton lavished innumerable favours upon him, and Queen Elizabeth laid herself out to pay tribute to the nobility of his nature and his genius. It was at her Majesty's express desire that he wrote the "Merry Wives of Windsor," in order to introduce Sir John Falstaff in the character, not of a hero, but of a lover; and not content with seeing his plays enacted, she took especial delight in inviting him to Court, to read them before her, justly conceiving Shakespeare himself to be the fittest exponent of his

own matchless creations. Shakespeare was not ungrateful for this mark of royal preference, which he acknowledged by begging the Queen's gracious acceptance of a copy of his works.



RICHARD PERKINS.

Another instance of the high estimation in which our dramatist was held by royalty occurs in an anecdote related of him on good authority. Queen Elizabeth used frequently, as was the custom of personages of high rank at that period, to appear upon the stage before the audience, or to sit at the back of the stage while the performance was going on. One evening, when Shakespeare himself was personating the part of a king, the audience became aware of Her Majesty's being in the theatre, and testified their appreciation of the presence of their sovereign in the usual manner. The Queen thereupon crossed the stage while he was performing, and on receiving the accustomed greeting from the audience, moved



SHAKESPEARE PRESENTING A COPY OF HIS PLAYS TO QUEEN ELIZABETH.

courteously toward the poet, who, however, appeared so engrossed in the rendering of his part, as not to heed the honour paid him by his royal mistress. Presently the Queen caught his eye, and moved again, but still the actor would not throw off his assumed character; this, it appears, made Her Majesty persist in endeavouring to secure a public acknowledgment of her condescension. Accordingly, as he was about to make his exit, she stepped before him, dropped her glove, and recrossed the stage. This was too strong an intimation of the Queen's desire, to be left unnoticed. So, upon finishing his speech, he picked up the glove, and so aptly delivered the following impromptu lines, that they seemed to belong to his part:

> "And though now bent on this high embassy,
> Yet stoop we to take up our cousin's glove."

He thereupon walked off the stage, and presented the glove to the Queen, who, equally pleased with his wit and his gallantry, warmly complimented him on his appropriate behaviour under such novel and trying circumstances.

The genial disposition of our bard naturally inclined him to good fellowship; and he might frequently be found at the Mermaid Tavern, in Friday-street, in company with Ben Jonson (his bosom friend), Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden, Carew, Myddleton, Dekker, Cotton, Martin, Donne, and other choice spirits, at once the lustre and the pride of that glorious Elizabethan epoch. Here he would engage in conflicts of wit with his great rival, drawing forth the apt and felicitous allusion of Fuller, who compares Shakespeare to an English man-of-war, and Jonson to a Spanish galleon.

"Master Jonson, like the latter, was built far higher in learning, solid but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, like the former, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention;" a com-

parison whose point lay in the then recent defeat of the Spanish Armada.

It has been objected that the writers of this era were tavern-haunting revellers, but the poet cannot write a great play if he shut himself from the world in philosophic reverie; he must open his soul to the ever-changing influences of a life of action, the spirits of the market-place and forum must be no less powerful over his thoughts than the spirits of the cavern. They were no mere dreamers who wrote the glorious plays of the Elizabethan time. Strong-thinking, full-passioned men, they lived, many of them, wild, irregular lives, too fond, may be, of bright eyes, bright wine, and the rattle of the dice, and some of them died sad, unhopeful deaths; but they were, nevertheless, brave, loving spirits, and the thoughts which flooded their souls they poured out to other men in nervous words which it strengthens a man's mind to read. The man of science or philosophy, may shut himself up amid musty tomes and strange apparatus, but he who would paint humanity, must dip his brushes in the stream of life wheresoever it may flow.

Of the three other taverns (the Boar's Head, the Falcon, and the Devil), made famous by their connection with Shakespeare and his friends, the Old Boar's Head in Eastcheap is the most conspicuous. The centre of a locality specially devoted to feasting and revelry, where "the cookes cried hot ribbes of beef rosted, pies well baked, and other victuals;" its sign was most aptly chosen, since here, too, was the "cooke's dwelling," where Prince Henry and his brothers John and Thomas, at 3 o'clock in the morning (a more discreditable hour then than even now), created that riot which resulted in the interference of the mayor and sheriffs, the final discomfiture of the princes before Judge Gascoigne, and the merited censure of their kingly sire. What a lesson for modern magistrates!

Though it was at the Mermaid in Friday-street assembled the club of which Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden, Cotton, Carew, Martin, Donne, and other celebrities of the day were members, and between whom



JUDGE GASCOIGNE.

arose those pleasant "wit combats" to which Fuller alludes; yet, it is the Boar's Head which our poet has been pleased to single out as the rendezvous of Sir John Falstaff, that rollicking sea of humour, and his roystering companions, probably from no other motive than to point his satire against the Sir John Falstaff who owned the "Boar's Head" in High-street, Southwark, demised by him to Magdalen College, Oxford. Modern commentators dispute the identity of this hero of the French Wars with Shakespeare's inimitable braggart; but might it not be an "inhabitant" of Southwark, not "Stratford," with whom Shakespeare is said to have disputed about some property adjoining his own, and whose

portrait he has drawn so wondrously? and if so, the same spirit of resentment which pinned immortal obloquy to Sir Thomas Lucy's sleeve, would, naturally enough, prompt the severe retaliation of handing down to future time a caricature of this man, were he thrice three times a hero, and not, as is possible, sunk into a bully in his dotage.



SIR JOHN FALSTAFF.

It is on record, that William of Wickham came from Windsor, while he was surveyor of the alterations and additions to the Castle, to meet John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, at the Boar's Head, but no mention is made of either host or hostess, until Shakespeare placed the "gentlewoman named

Dame Quickly" in juxtaposition with Sir John Falstaff. This Dame Quickly, according to Goldsmith, became entangled in the meshes of an artful prior of a neighbouring convent, and after serving his purposes, and resigning the tavern to his uses for years, in revenge for some real or imaginary slight, he sent her and her women to the house of



DAME QUICKLY AND FALSTAFF.

correction, where she was unhappily whipped to death. The tavern then became a monastic offshoot of the convent of this dissolute prior, who was, in turn, burnt for sorcery, and it afterwards passed into the hands of a cast-off mistress of the King, under whose management it grew into great repute, drunkenness being the vice of the age. Gaming, in course of

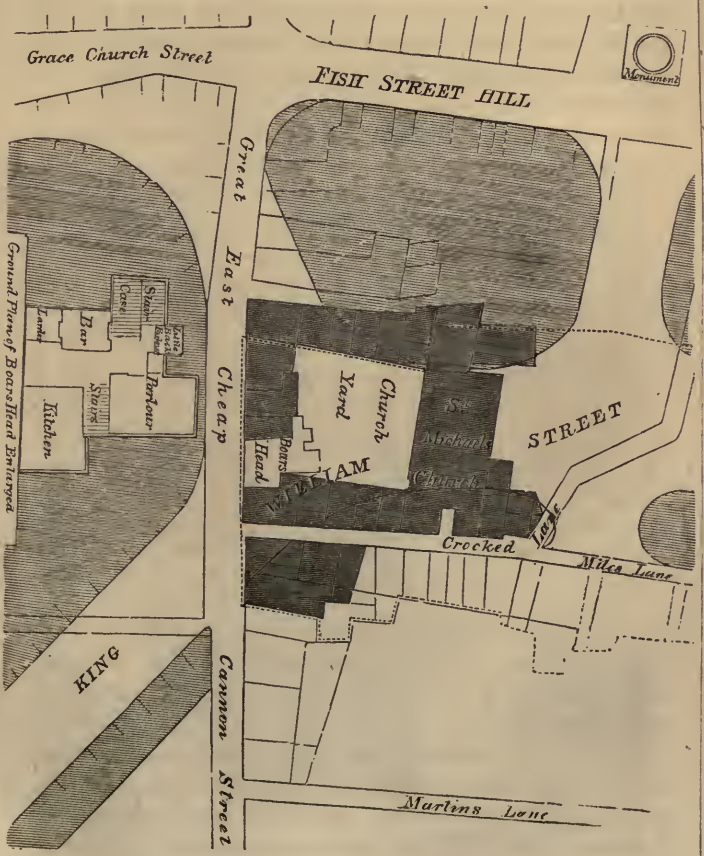
time, followed on the heels of drunkenness, and in one of the wide-chimnied, quaintly-carved rooms of this very tavern, with stained glass windows emblazoned with escutcheons, did the last Henry play away and lose the four great bells of Old St. Paul's, and the image of the saint which stood on the top of the spire, to Sir Miles Partridge, who took them down the following day, and sold them by auction. The last hostess of note was Jane Rouse—one from the lower ranks of life—who, being frugal and complaisant, acquired a moderate fortune. As fate would have it, however, she could not



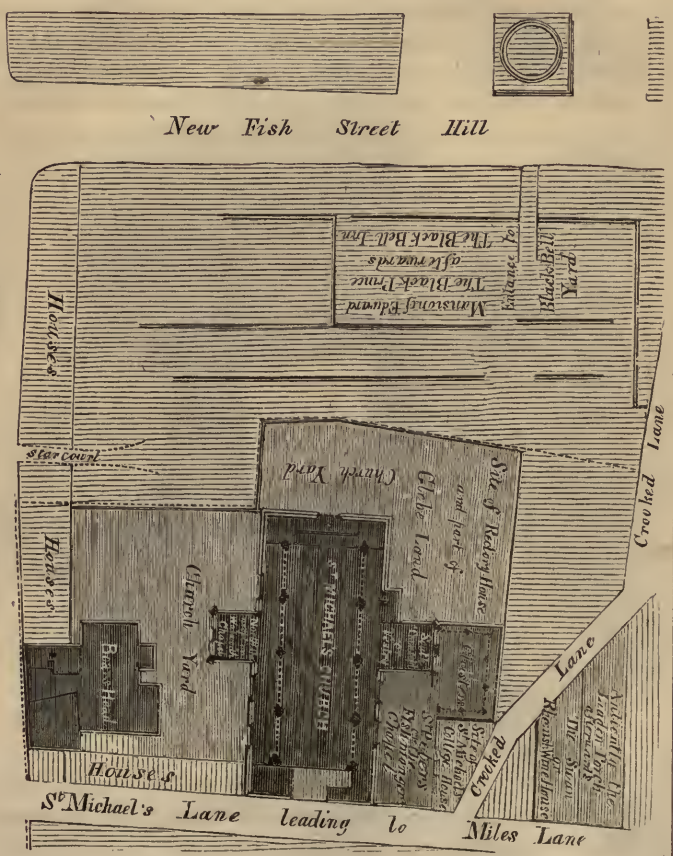
SHAKESPEARE RELIC.

refrain from quarrelling with a sanctimonious neighbour, who retaliated by accusing her of witchcraft. She was thereupon taken from her own bar to the bar of the Old Bailey, condemned and executed.

The original building was of wood, with one storey projecting over another, ornamented with vast Gothic windows, stained with coats of arms. At the doorway flourished a large vine growing upon supporters, and over it were suspended a blue Boar, a Bacchus, a tun, and a bunch of grapes. The Great Fire of 1666, which began in Pudding-lane, close by, consumed this edifice; but a Boar's Head with silver



PLAN OF OLD BOAR'S HEAD TAVERN, AND LOCALITY.



PLAN OF BOAR'S HEAD AND SITE OF THE OLD PRIORY.

tusks, which had hung in one of the rooms, fell down with the ruins of the house, whence it was removed to Whitechapel Mount, where, many years after, it was discovered and identified with its former position. In two years, a second Boar's Head Tavern sprung up on the site of the old one, a fact attested by a Boar's Head carved in stone, with the initials of the landlord J. T., and the date 1668 cut therein, which is now to be seen in the Guildhall Library. Maitland in 1730, mentions the Boar's Head as the chief tavern in London at that period.

In 1834, Mr. Kemp, F.S A., exhibited before the Society of Antiquaries, a carved oak figure of Sir John Falstaff, in the costume of the 16th century. It had supported an ornamental bracket over one side of the door of the Boar's Head, a figure of Prince Henry sustaining that on the other. This carving belonged to a Mr. Shelton, brazier, Great Eastcheap, whose ancestors had lived in the same house ever since the Great Fire. Mr. Shelton remembered the last grand Shakesperian Dinner at the Boar's Head. This was about 1784, and much honest enthusiasm is said to have prevailed on the occasion. At a public house in Miles-lane was long preserved a tobacco box, with a painting of the original Boar's Head Tavern on the lid. It was considered a great curiosity and much sought after.

The accompanying two plans of the Old Boar's Head, and the general locality at the time we are speaking of, may be interesting to our readers.

The site of the old tavern itself is, as nearly as can be ascertained, the present King William Statue.

The pen of Shakespeare consecrates all it sketches; and thus, Herne's Oak, in the Home Park, Windsor, the scene of Falstaff's final defeat by the "Merry Wives," has long been regarded as a sacred relic. Who would, in these days, have known aught of the legendary hunter, Herne, who, in life, a keeper of the forest, after death, antlered like a deer, at-

tended by a pack of demon hounds, was said to ride through the park at midnight, and vanish at his starting point, the ancient oak which bore his name; had not the Poet given fresh life to the dying legend? This relic (of which a memento is presented) was blown down in the high winds last autumn, and by Her Majesty's command removed to the



HERNE'S OAK.

Castle, to preserve it from pillage. The Garter Inn, prominent in the play, exists at this day as the "Star and Garter," in Peascod-street; it has been named as the hostel where Shakespeare wrote the "Merry Wives of Windsor." But this is an error, for he penned it at the Hope Inn, Frogmore, then known as the "Bottle on the Moor."

It is a delightful feature in the character of Shakespeare, that he did not forget his home friends, or the scenes of his youth. As his fortunes rose, so did that of his sire. As has already been told, it was his wont to visit Stratford annually, and in 1597 he completed the purchase of New Place, a mansion of considerable size, for the residence of his family,



decreased by the death of Hammet in the preceding year. He himself continued to reside in London, at one time occupying a house in the vicinity of the *Times* printing office, Printing House Square, leased to him by the Corporation of the City of London; at another lodging in close proximity to the Bear Garden, Southwark, where he held house property,

as would seem from assessments made on him, as also for other property in the liberty of the Clink.

The future founder of Dulwich College, Edward Alleyn, became the purchaser of Shakespeare's interest in the Blackfriar's Theatre, properties, and wardrobe, although the document quoted by Mr. Collier merely refers to the lease. It is as follows:—

"1612.

"Money paid by me, E. A., for the Blackfriars . 160 li.
"More for the Blackfriars 126 li.
"More again for lease 310 ii.
"The writings for the same, and other small charges, £3 6s. 8d."

Subsequent memoranda, by Edward Alleyne, show that he paid rent for the theatre, and expended sums upon the building.

We give a portrait of Alleyne, as one who was not only mixed up with our hero in monetary transactions in his latter days, but because he was a public benefactor in every sense of the word.

It was not until about 1613, that Shakespeare finally retired from public life, after creating a drama, and founding a literature, and joined the surviving members of his family in retirement at New Place. Susanna, his favourite daughter, had been married since 1607 to Dr. Hall, a physician of much skill and repute; and in 1616, his younger daughter, Judith, married Mr. Thomas Quiney, vintner, of Stratford. On the 25th of March, in the same year, Shakespeare made his will, being at the time, as he himself expresses it, "in perfect health and memory, God be praised!" and on the 23rd of the following month, after a very brief illness, the "gentle Bard of Avon," "Nature's sweetest child," the "Poet of all time," as he has been variously called, yielded back his spirit to the God who gave it.

Incomparable as he was, and wide as was the gap occa-

sioned by his death, no particular rites of sepulture appear to have been observed; for, on the second day after his decease, his remains were interred on the north side of the chancel in the parish church of Stratford. Here a monument, containing a bust of the poet, executed by Gerard Johnson, was



MONUMENT IN STRATFORD CHURCH.

after a while erected. The bust is the size of life, is formed out of a block of soft stone, and was originally painted over, in imitation of nature. The hands and face, says Mr. Britton, were of a flesh colour, the eyes of a light hazel, and the hair and beard auburn; the doublet or coat was scarlet, and covered with a loose black gown or tabard,

without sleeves; the upper part of the cushion was green, the under half crimson, and the tassels gilt. Such appear to have been the original features of this important, but neglected or insulted bust. After remaining in this state above 120 years, it was repaired, and the original colours preserved. In 1793, the bust was covered over with white paint, which destroyed its original character, and greatly injured the expression of the face. The following is the inscription beneath the bust:—

IVDICIO PYLIVM, GENIO SOCRATEM, ARTE MARONEM,
TERRA TEGIT, POPVLVS MÆRET OLYMPVS HABET.
STAY, PASSENGER, WHY GOEST THOV BY SO FAST?
READ, IF THOV CANST, WHOM ENVIOVS DEATH HATH PLAST
WITHIN THIS MONVMENT, SHAKSPEARE, WITH WHOME
QVICK NATVRE DIDE; WHOSE NAME DOTH DECK YE TOMBE
FAR MORE THAN COST; SITH ALL YT HE HATH WRITT
LEAVES LIVING ART BVT PAGE TO SERVE HIS WIT.

Obitt ano. doi. 1616. *Ætatis* 53, *die* 23 *Ap.*

Later on, in 1741, a cenotaph, raised by performances at the principal London theatres, and which cost about £300, was placed in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey, that grand old depository of England's mighty dead.

But Shakespeare has a nobler, a more lasting monument than either of these. As Milton himself, only second to Shakespeare, beautifully observes, he has his own imperishable works; and what other more touching tribute could be paid to him than was paid by "rare Ben Jonson," when he said "I love the man, and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any."

Our frontispiece portrait is copied from the first folio, and has a certain similarity to the coloured bust in the chancel. Although inferior as a work of art, it seems to be regarded as the most authentic likeness we possess of the Poet. This original portrait was engraved by Droeshout. The ornamental surroundings and autographs we have added.

Accompanying the original are some verses by Ben Jonson, which of themselves attest to a certain truthfulness, which gives this portrait an interest over the many other and apparently better ones published in various editions.

"This figure, that thou here seest put
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the graver had a strife
With Nature, to out-doo the life.
O, could he but have drawne his wit
As well in brasse as he hath hit
His face, the print would then surpasse
All that was ever writt in brasse;
But since he cannot, reader, looke
Not on his picture, but his booke."

While giving Ben Jonson's testimony to his friend's face, and elsewhere to his worth, we cannot help also noticing how Spenser referred to him in his "*Teares of the Muses*," and although a doubt has been expressed as to the words in italics referring to Shakespeare, we cannot help crediting the evidence adduced by Charles Knight, that they could not have been intended for any but Shakespeare.

TEARES OF THE MUSES.

"And he, the man whom Nature selfe had made
To mock herselfe, and Truth to imitate
With kindly counter under mimick shade,
Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late;
With whom all joy and jolly merriment
Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.

"Instead thereof, scoffing Scurrilitie,
And scornful follie with Contempt is crept,
Rolling in rymes of shamelcss ribandrie,
Without regard or due decorum kept;
Each idle wit at will presumes to make
And doth the learned's taske upon him take.

" But that same gentle spirit, from whose pen
Large streams of honnie and sweete Nectar flowe,
Scorning the boldness of such base-born men,
Which dare their follies forth so rashlie throwe,
Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell,
Than so himself to mockery to sell."

In the first edition of Shakespeare, Rowe mentions that " Mr. Dryden was always of opinion that these verses were meant of Shakespeare."

Five full page illustrations which accompany this *brochure*, and which respectively represent the history (*Henry the Fourth*), the poetry (*Midsummer Night's Dream*), the mythology (the *Tempest*), the comedy (*Much ado About Nothing*), and the tragedy (*Hamlet*), of Shakespeare, only faintly indicate the magnitude and diversity of his genius; for not only did all creation lavish her boundless wealth at his feet, but having " exhausted old worlds," he next " created new."

Of the works he left to posterity, the following are preserved: those marked * were printed in their great author's lifetime, and the whole collected by his fellowes, Heminge and Condell, were published in 1623.

1. The Comedy of Errors.
*2. Love's Labour Lost.
*3. Romeo and Juliet.
4. Henry VI., the First Part.
*5. Henry VI., the Second Part.
*6. Henry VI., the Third Part.
7. The Two Gentlemen of Verona.
*8. Richard III.
*9. Richard II.
*10. The Merry Wives of Windsor.
*11. Henry IV., the First Part.
*12. Henry IV., the Second Part.
*13. Henry V.
*14. The Merchant of Venice.
*15. Hamlet.

16. King John.
*17. A Midsummer Night's Dream.
18. The Taming of the Shrew.
19. All's Well that Ends Well.
*20. Much Ado About Nothing.
21. As You Like It.
*22. Troilus and Cressida.
23. Timon of Athens.
24. The Winter's Tale.
25. Measure for Measure.
*26. Lear.
27. Cymbeline.
28. Macbeth
29. Julius Cæsar.
30. Anthony and Cleopatra.
31. Coriolanus.
32. The Tempest.
33. The Twelfth Night.
34. Henry VIII.
*35. Othello.
*Titus Andronicus.
*Pericles.

These are given in the supposed order of production, with the exception of the last two plays, the authorship of which has been much disputed. The Poems comprise—

Venus and Adonis.
The Rape of Lucrece.
Fifty-four Sonnets.
The Passionate Pilgrim.
A Lover's Complaint.

The titles under which our poet originally published his plays cannot fail to interest the reader, now that everything relating to him becomes invested with a charm peculiarly its own. The orthography is the same as appears on the title pages of the first quarto editions.

The Tragedy of King Richard the third, containing, His treacherous

Plots against his brother Clarence: the pittiefull murther of his innocent nephewes: his tyrannicall vsurpation: with the whole course of his detested life, and most deserued death, 1597.

The History of Henrie the Fovrth; with the battell at Shrewsburie, between the King and Lord Henry Percy, surnamed Hotspur of the North. With the humorous conceits of Sir Iohn Falstalffe, 1598.

A Pleasant Conceited Comedie called Loues labors lost. As it was presented before her Highness this last Christmas, 1598.

Much adoe about Nothing. As it hath been sundrie times publikely acted by the right honourable the Lord Chamberlaine, his seruants, 1600.

A Midsomer nights dreame, 1600.

The most excellente Historie of the merchant of Venice with the extreame cruelties of Shylocke the Iewe towards the sayd Merchant, in cutting a iust pound of his flesh: and the obtaining of Portia by the choyse of three chests, 1600.

The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, prince of Denmarke. Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie, 1604.


HAMLET
GILKS

HAMLET.

Act I., Scene V.

A more remote part of the Platform.

Enter Ghost *and* Hamlet.

Ham. Whither wilt thou lead me? speak, I'll go no further.
Ghost. Mark me.
Ham. I will.
Ghost. My hour is almost come,
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.
Ham. Alas, poor Ghost!
Ghost. Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold.
Ham. Speak, I am bound to hear.
Ghost. So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.
Ham. What!
Ghost. I am thy father's spirit:
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And, for the day, confin'd to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes, done in my days of nature
Are burn't and purg'd away. But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul; freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres;——

THE TEMPEST.

Act I., Scene II.

Re-enter Ariel, *invisible, playing and singing*; Ferdinand *following.*

Ariel's *song.*

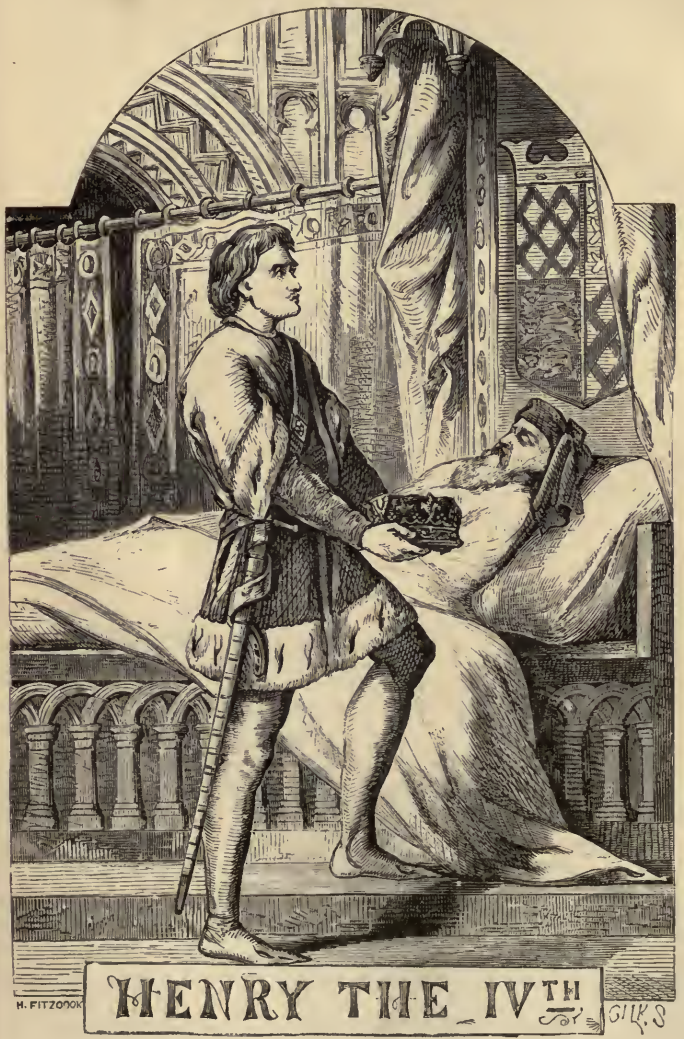
Come unto these yellow sands,
And then take hands:
Court'sied when you have and kiss'd,—
The wild waves whist,—
Foot it featly here and there;
And, sweet sprites, the burden bear.
Hark, hark!
Burden. Bough, wough.
The watch dogs bark:
(*Dispersedly.*
Bough, wough.
Hark, hark! I hear
The strains of strutting chanticleer
Cry "Cock-a-doodle-doo."

Ferdinand. Where should this music be? i' the air, or the earth?
It sounds no more:—and sure it waits upon some god of the island.

* * *



THE TEMPEST


H. FITZOMOK
HENRY THE IV TH
SILKS

KING HENRY THE FOURTH.

Act IV., Scene IV.

Exeunt all but Prince Henry.

P. Hen. Why doth the crown lie there upon his pillow,
Being so troublesome a bed-fellow?
O polish'd perturbation! golden care!
That keep'st the ports of slumber open wide
To many a watchful night!—sleep with it now!
Yet not so sound, and half so deeply sweet,
As he, whose brow, with homely biggin bound,
Snores out the watch of night. O majesty!
When thou dost pinch thy bearer, thou dost sit
Like'a rich armour worn in heat of day,
That scalds with safety. By his gates of breath
There lies a downy feather, which stirs not:
Did he suspire, that light and weightless down
Perforce must move.—My gracious lord! my father!——
This sleep is sound indeed; this is a sleep,
That from the golden rigol hath divorc'd
So many English kings. Thy due, from me,
Is tears, and heavy sorrows of the blood;
Which nature, love, and filial tenderness,
Shall, O dear father, pay thee plenteously:
My due from thee, is this imperial crown,
Which, as immediate from thy place and blood,
Derives itself to me. Lo, here it sits,—
[*Putting it on his head.*
Which God shall guard:——

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

ACT II., SCENE II. — *A Wood.*
LYSANDER *and* HERMIA *asleep.*

Enter PUCK.

Puck. Through the forest have I gone,
But Athenian found I none,
On whose eyes I might approve
This flower's force in stirring love.
Night and silence! who is here?
Weeds of Athens he doth wear;
This is he, my master said,
Despised the Athenian maid;
And here the maiden, sleeping sound,
On the dank and dirty ground.
Pretty soul, she durst not lie
Near this lack-love, this kill-court'sy.
Churl, upon thy eyes I throw
All the power this charm doth owe:
When thou wak'st, let love forbid
Sleep his seat on thy eyelid.
So awake, when I am gone:
For I must now to Oberon.

[*Exit.*

Enter Demetrius and Helena, running.



MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM


MUCH·ADO·ABOUT·NOTHING

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

Act III., Scene I.

Ursula *and* Hero *conversing in* Leonato's *Garden.*

Enter Beatrice, *behind.*

Hero. No; rather I will go to Benedick,
And counsel him to fight against his passion:
And, truly, I'll devise some honest slanders
To stain my cousin with: one doth not know,
How much an ill word may empoison liking.

Urs. O, do not do your cousin such a wrong.
She cannot be so much without true judgment
(Having so swift and excellent a wit,
As she is priz'd to have,) as to refuse
So rare a gentleman as Signior Benedick.

Hero. He is the only man of Italy,
Always excepted my dear Claudio.

Urs. I pray you, be not angry with me, madam,
Speaking my fancy; Signior Benedick,
For shape, for bearing, argument, and valour,
Goes foremost in report through Italy.

Hero. Indeed he hath an excellent good name.

Urs. His excellence did earn it, ere he had it.—
When are you married, madam?

Hero. Why, every day:—to-morrow: come, go in;
I'll show thee some attires; and have thy counsel,
Which is the best to furnish me to-morrow.

Urs. [*aside.*] She's lim'd, I warrant you; we have caught her, madam.

Hero. [*aside.*] If it prove so, then loving goes by haps:
Some, Cupid kills by arrows, some with traps.

[*Exeunt Hero and Ursula.*

SHAKESPEARE'S WILL,

FROM THE ORIGINAL IN THE OFFICE OF THE PREROGATIVE COURT OF CANTERBURY.

Vicesimo quinto die Martii, Anno Regni Domini nostri Jacobi nunc, Regis Angliæ, etc., decimo quarto, et Scotiæ quadragesimo nono. Anno Domini 1616.

In the name of God, Amen. I, William Shakespeare, of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick, gent., in perfect health and memory (God be praised), do make and ordain this my last will and testament, in manner and form following (that is to say):—

First, I commend my soul into the hands of God, my Creator, hoping, and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ, my Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting; and my body to the earth whereof it is made.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my daughter Judith, one hundred and fifty pounds of lawful English money, to be paid unto her in manner and form following (that is to say):—One hundred pounds in discharge of her marriage portion, within one year after my decease, with consideration after the rate of two shillings in the pound, for so long a time as the same shall be unpaid unto her after my decease; and the fifty pounds residue thereof, upon her surrendering of, or giving of such sufficient security as the overseers of this my will shall

like of, to surrender or grant, all her estate and right that shall descend or come unto her after my decease, or that she now hath, of, in, or to, one copyhold tenement, with the appurtenances, lying and being in Stratford-upon-Avon aforesaid, in the said county of Warwick, being parcel or holden of the manor of Rowington, unto my daughter Susanna Hall, and her heirs for ever.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my said daughter Judith one hundred and fifty pounds more, if she, or any issue of her body, be living at the end of three years next ensuing the day of the date of this my will, during which time my executors to pay her consideration from my decease, according to the rate, aforesaid: and if she die within the said term without issue of her body, then my will is, and I do give and bequeath, one hundred pounds thereof to my niece, Elizabeth Hall, and the fifty pounds to be set forth by my executors during the life of my sister Joan Hart, and the use and profit thereof coming shall be paid to my said sister Joan, and after her decease the said fifty pounds shall remain amongst the children of my said sister, equally to be divided amongst them; but if my said daughter Judith be living at the end of the said three years, or any issue of her body, then my will is, and so I devise and bequeath, the said hundred and fifty pounds to be set out by my executors and overseers for the best benefit of her and her issue, and the stock not to be paid unto her so long as she shall be married and covert baron; but my will is, that she shall have the consideration yearly paid unto her during her life, and after her decease, the said stock and consideration to be paid to her children, if she have any, and if not, to her executors or assigns, she living the said term after my decease: provided that if such husband as she shall at the end of the said three years be married unto, or at any (time) after, do sufficiently assure unto her, and the issue of her body, lands answerable to the portion by this my

will given unto her, and to be adjudged so by my executors and overseers, then my will is, that the said hundred and fifty pounds shall be paid to such husband as shall make such assurance, to his own use.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my said sister Joan twenty pounds, and all my wearing apparel, to be paid and delivered within one year after my decease; and I do will and devise unto her the house, with the appurtenances, in Stratford, wherein she dwelleth, for her natural life, under the yearly rent of twelve pence.

Item. I give and bequeath unto her three sons, William Hart, ——— Hart, and Michael Hart, five pounds apiece, to be paid within one year after my decease.

Item. I give and bequeath unto the said Elizabeth Hall all my plate (except my broad silver and gilt bowl), that I now have at the date of this my will.

Item. I give and bequeath unto the poor of Stratford aforesaid, ten pounds; to Mr. Thomas Combe, my sword; to Thomas Russell, Esq., five pounds; and to Francis Collins, of the borough of Warwick, in the county of Warwick, gent., thirteen pounds six shillings and eight pence, to be paid within one year after my decease.

Item. I give and bequeath to Hamlet Sadler, twenty-six shillings eight pence, to buy him a ring; to my godson, William Walker, twenty shillings in gold; to Anthony Nash, gent., twenty-six shillings eight pence; and to Mr. John Nash, twenty-six shillings eight pence; and to my fellows, John Hemyngs, Richard Burbage, and Henry Condell, twenty-six shillings eight pence apiece, to buy them rings.

Item. I give, will, bequeath, and devise unto my daughter, Susanna Hall, for the better enabling her to perform this my will, and towards the performance thereof, all that capital messuage or tenement, with the appurtenances, in Stratford aforesaid, called The New Place, wherein I now dwell, and

two messuages or tenements, with the appurtenances, situate, lying, and being in Henley-street, within the borough of Stratford aforesaid, and all my barns, stables, orchards, gardens, lands, tenements, and hereditaments whatsoever, situate, lying, and being, or to be had, received, perceived, or taken, within the town, hamlets, villages, fields, and grounds, of Stratford-upon-Avon, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe, or in any of them, in the said county of Warwick; and also all that messuage or tenement, with the appurtenances, wherein one John Robinson dwelleth, situate, lying, and being in the Blackfriars in London, near the Wardrobe: and all other my lands, tenements, and hereditaments whatsoever, to have and to hold all and singular the said premises, with their appurtenances, unto the said Susanna Hall, for and during the term of her natural life; and after her decease, to the first son of her body, lawfully issuing; and for default of such issue, to the second son, lawfully issuing; and for default of such heirs, to the third son of the body of the said Susanna, lawfully issuing, and to the heirs-males of the body of the said third son, lawfully issuing; and for default of such issue, the same so to be and remain to the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh sons of her body, lawfully issuing one after another, and to the heirs-males of the bodies of the said fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh sons, lawfully issuing, in such manner as it is before limited to be and remain to the first, second, and third sons of her body, and to their heirs-males; and for default of such issue, the said premises to be and to remain to my said niece Hall, and the heirs-males of her body, lawfully issuing; and for default of such issue, to my daughter Judith, and the heirs-males of her body, lawfully issuing, and for default of such issue, to the right heirs of me the said William Shakespeare for ever.

Item. I give unto my wife my second best bed, with the furniture.

Item. I give and bequeath to my said daughter Judith, my broad silver gilt bowl. All the rest of my goods, chattels, leases, plate, jewels, and household stuff whatsoever, after my debts and legacies paid, and my funeral expenses discharged, I give, devise, and bequeath to my son-in-law, John Hall, gent., and my daughter Susanna, his wife, whom I ordain and make executors of this my last will and testament. And I do entreat and appoint the said Thomas Russell, Esq., and Francis Collins, gent., to be overseers hereof. And do revoke all former wills, and publish this to be my last will and testament. In witness whereof I have hereunto put my hand, the day and year first above written.

By me,
WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE.

Witness to the publishing hereof,
FRA. COLLYNS,
JULIUS SHAW,
JOHN ROBINSON,
HAMNET SADLER,
ROBERT WHATCOTT.

Probatum fuit testamentum suprascriptum apud London, coram Magistro William Byrde, Legum Doctore, etc., vicesimo secundo die mensis Junii, Anno Domini, 1616*; juramento Johannis Hall unius ex, cui, etc., de bene, etc., jurat reservata potestate, etc. Susannæ Hall, alt. ex., etc., eam cum venerit, etc., petitur, etc.*

The will is written on three sheets of paper, the last two of which are undoubtedly subscribed with Shakespeare's own hand.

SIXPENNY MONTHLY PARTS

Charles Knight's Stratford Shakspere,

Each part contains a complete Play and Two Illustrations.

JUL. 'T is almost morning, I would have thee gone:
And yet no further than a wanton's bird;
Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty.
ROM. I would I were thy bird.
JUL. Sweet, so would I:
Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing.
Good night, good night! parting is such sweet sorrow,
That I shall say good night, till it be morrow. [*Exit.*
ROM. Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!—
'Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!
Hence will I to my ghostly friar's close cell;
His help to crave, and my dear hap to tell. [*Exit.*

SCENE III.—Friar Laurence's *Cell.*

Enter FRIAR LAURENCE, *with a basket.*

FRI. The gray-ey'd morn smiles on the frowning night,
Checkering the eastern clouds with streaks of light;
And flecked darkness like a drunkard reels
From forth day's path, and Titan's fiery wheels:
Now ere the sun advance his burning eye,
The day to cheer, and night's dank dew to dry,
I must up-fill this osier cage of ours,
With baleful weeds, and precious-juiced flowers.
The earth, that 's nature's mother, is her tomb;
What is her burying grave, that is her womb:
And from her womb children of divers kind
We sucking on her natural bosom find:
Many for many virtues excellent,
None but for some, and yet all different.
O, mickle is the powerful grace, that lies
In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities:
For nought so vile that on the earth doth live,
But to the earth some special good doth give;
Nor aught so good, but, strain'd from that fair use,
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse:

SPECIMEN PAGE

Where, and what time, thou wilt perform the rite;
And all my fortunes at thy foot I 'll lay,
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.

NURSE. [*Within.*] Madam.

JUL. I come, anon:—But if thou mean'st not well,
I do beseech thee—

NURSE. [*Within.*] Madam.

JUL. By and by, I come:—
To cease thy strife and leave me to my grief:
To-morrow will I send.

ROM. So thrive my soul,—

JUL. A thousand times good night! [*Exit.*

ROM. A thousand times the worse to want thy light—
Love goes toward love, as schoolboys from their books;
But love from love, toward school with heavy looks.
[*Retiring slowly.*

Re-enter JULIET, *above.*

JUL. Hist! Romeo, hist!—O, for a falconer's voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!
Bondage is hoarse, and may not speak aloud;
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies,
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine
With repetition of my Romeo.

ROM. It is my soul, that calls upon my name:
How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears!

JUL. Romeo.

ROM. My—

NURSE. [*Within.*] Madam.

JUL. What o'clock to-morrow
Shall I send to thee?

ROM. By the hour of nine.

JUL. I will not fail; 't is twenty years till then.
I have forgot why I did call thee back.

ROM. Let me stand here till thou remember it.

JUL. I shall forget, to have thee still stand there,
Rememb'ring how I love thy company.

ROM. And I 'll still stay, to have thee still forget,
Forgetting any other home but this.



KING LEAR.

LEAR. "Off, hell hounds! by the gods I charge you spare her."


KING
LEAR

SHAKSPEARE

A BIOGRAPHY

BY

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

THE ENGLISH OPIUM-EATER.

EDINBURGH

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

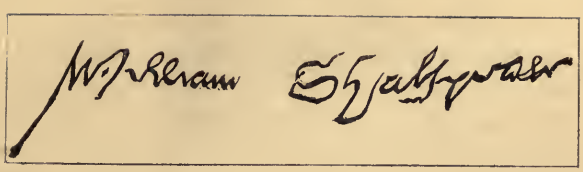
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NOTE.

In issuing this Biography in a separate form and at the present time, it is perhaps only necessary to mention, in justice to the author, that it was written in the year 1838, and had not the benefit of any revision before his lamented death, which occurred in the year 1859.

Edinburgh, *April* 1864.



William Shakspeare, the protagonist on the great arena of modern poetry, and the glory of the human intellect, was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick, in the year 1564, and upon some day not precisely ascertained, in the month of April. It is certain that he was baptized on the 25th; and from that fact, combined with some shadow of a tradition, Malone has inferred that he was born on the 23d. There is doubtless, on the one hand, no absolute necessity deducible from law or custom, as either operated in those times, which obliges us to adopt such a conclusion; for children might be baptized, and were baptized, at various distances from their birth: yet, on the other hand, the 23d is as likely to have been the day as any other; and more likely than any earlier day, upon two arguments. First, because there was probably a tradition floating in the seventeenth century, that Shakspeare died upon his birth-day: now it is beyond a doubt that he died upon the 23d of April. Secondly, because it is a reasonable presumption, that no parents, living in a simple community, tenderly alive to the pieties

of household duty, and in an age still clinging reverentially to the ceremonial ordinances of religion, would much delay the adoption of their child into the great family of Christ. Considering the extreme frailty of an infant's life during its two earliest years, to delay would often be to disinherit the child of its Christian privileges; privileges not the less eloquent to the feelings from being profoundly mysterious, and, in the English church, forced not only upon the attention, but even upon the eye, of the most thoughtless. According to the discipline of the English church, the unbaptized are buried with "maimed rites," shorn of their obsequies, and sternly denied that "sweet and solemn farewell" by which otherwise the church expresses her final charity with all men; and not only so, but they are even *locally* separated and sequestrated. Ground the most hallowed, and populous with Christian burials of households,

> That died in peace with one another,
> Father, sister, son, and brother,

opens to receive the vilest malefactor; by which the church symbolically expresses her maternal willingness to gather back into her fold those even of her flock who have strayed from her by the most memorable aberrations; and yet, with all this indulgence, she banishes to unhallowed ground the innocent bodies of the unbaptized. To them and to suicides she turns a face of wrath. With this gloomy fact offered to the very external senses, it is difficult to suppose that any parents would risk their own reproaches by putting the fulfilment of so grave a duty on the hazard of a convulsion fit. The case of royal

children is different; their baptisms, it is true, were often delayed for weeks; but the household chaplains of the palace were always at hand, night and day, to baptize them in the very agonies of death.* We must presume, therefore, that William Shakspeare was born on some day very little anterior to that of his baptism; and the more so because the season of the year was lovely and genial, the 23d of April in 1564 corresponding in fact with what we now call the 3d of May, so that, whether the child was to be carried abroad, or the clergyman to be summoned, no hindrance would arise from the weather. One only argument has sometimes struck us for supposing that the 22d might be the day, and not the 23d; which is, that Shakspeare's sole grand-daughter, Lady Barnard, was married on the 22d of April 1626, ten years exactly from the poet's death; and the reason for choosing this day *might* have had a reference to her illustrious grandfather's birthday; which, there is good

* But, as a proof that, even in the case of royal christenings, it was not thought pious to "tempt God," as it were, by delay, Edward VI., the only son of Henry VIII., was born on the 12th day of October in the year 1537. And there was a delay on account of the sponsors, since the birth was not in London. Yet how little that delay was made, may be seen by this fact: The birth took place in the dead of the night, the day was Friday; and yet, in spite of all delay, the christening was most pompously celebrated on the succeeding Monday. And Prince Arthur, the elder brother of Henry VIII., was christened on the very next Sunday succeeding to his birth, notwithstanding an inevitable delay, occasioned by the distance of Lord Oxford, his godfather, and the excessive rains, which prevented the earl being reached by couriers, or himself reaching Winchester, without extraordinary exertions.

reason for thinking, would be celebrated as a festival in the family for generations. Still this choice *may* have been an accident, or governed merely by reason of convenience. And, on the whole, it is as well perhaps to acquiesce in the old belief, that Shakspeare was born and died on the 23d of April. We cannot do wrong if we drink to his memory on both 22d and 23d.

On a first review of the circumstances, we have reason to feel no little perplexity in finding the materials for a life of this transcendent writer so meagre and so few; and amongst them the larger part of doubtful authority. All the energy of curiosity directed upon this subject, through a period of one hundred and fifty years (for so long it is since Betterton the actor began to make researches) has availed us little or nothing. Neither the local traditions of his provincial birth-place, though sharing with London through half a century the honour of his familiar presence, nor the recollections of that brilliant literary circle with whom he lived in the metropolis, have yielded much more than such an outline of his history as is oftentimes to be gathered from the penurious records of a grave-stone. That he lived, and that he died, and that he was "a little lower than the angels;" —these make up pretty nearly the amount of our undisputed report. It may be doubted indeed whether at this day we are as accurately acquainted with the life of Shakspeare as with that of Chaucer, though divided from each other by an interval of two centuries, and (what should have been more effectual towards oblivion) by the wars of the two roses. And yet the traditional memory of a rural and a sylvan region, such as Warwickshire at

that time was, is usually exact as well as tenacious; and, with respect to Shakspeare in particular, we may presume it to have been full and circumstantial through the generation succeeding to his own, not only from the curiosity, and perhaps something of a scandalous interest, which would pursue the motions of one living so large a part of his life at a distance from his wife, but also from the final reverence and honour which would settle upon the memory of a poet so pre-eminently successful; of one who, in a space of five-and-twenty years, after running a bright career in the capital city of his native land, and challenging notice from the throne, had retired with an ample fortune, created by his personal efforts, and by labours purely intellectual.

How are we to account, then, for that deluge, as if from Lethe, which has swept away so entirely the traditional memorials of one so illustrious? Such is the fatality of error which overclouds every question connected with Shakspeare, that two of his principal critics, Steevens, and Malone, have endeavoured to solve the difficulty by cutting it with a falsehood. They deny in effect that he *was* illustrious in the century succeeding to his own, however much he has since become so. We shall first produce their statements in their own words, and we shall then briefly review them.

Steevens delivers *his* opinion in the following terms :— "How little Shakspeare was once read, may be understood from Tate, who, in his dedication to the altered play of King Lear, speaks of the original as an obscure piece, recommended to his notice by a friend; and the author of the Tatler, having occasion to quote a few lines out of

Macbeth, was content to receive them from Davenant's alteration of that celebrated drama, in which almost every original beauty is either awkwardly disguised or arbitrarily omitted." Another critic, who cites this passage from Steevens, pursues the hypothesis as follows :—" In fifty years after his death, Dryden mentions that he was then become *a little obsolete.* In the beginning of the last century, Lord Shaftesbury complains of his *rude unpolished style, and his antiquated phrase and wit.* It is certain that, for nearly a hundred years after his death, partly owing to the immediate revolution and rebellion, and partly to the licentious taste encouraged in Charles II.'s time, and perhaps partly to the incorrect state of his works, he was ALMOST ENTIRELY NEGLECTED." This critic then goes on to quote with approbation the opinion of Malone,—" that if he had been read, admired, studied, and imitated, in the same degree as he is now, the enthusiasm of some one or other of his admirers in the last age would have induced him to make some inquiries concerning the history of his theatrical career, and the anecdotes of his private life." After which this enlightened writer reaffirms and clenches the judgment he has quoted by saying,—" His admirers, however, *if he had admirers in that age,* possessed no portion of such enthusiasm."

It may perhaps be an instructive lesson to young readers, if we now show them, by a short sifting of these confident dogmatists, how easy it is for a careless or a half-read man to circulate the most absolute falsehoods under the semblance of truth; falsehoods which impose upon himself as much as they do upon others. We believe that not one word or illustration is uttered in the sentences cited from

these three critics which is not *virtually* in the very teeth of the truth.

To begin with Mr Nahum Tate:—This poor grub of literature, if he did really speak of Lear as "an *obscure* piece, recommended to his notice by a friend," of which we must be allowed to doubt, was then uttering a conscious falsehood. It happens that Lear was one of the few Shakspearian dramas which had kept the stage unaltered. But it is easy to see a mercenary motive in such an artifice as this. Mr Nahum Tate is not of a class of whom it can be safe to say that they are "well known:" they and their desperate tricks are essentially obscure, and good reason he has to exult in the felicity of such obscurity; for else this same vilest of travesties, Mr Nahum's Lear, would consecrate his name to everlasting scorn. For himself, he belonged to the age of Dryden rather than of Pope; he "flourished," if we can use such a phrase of one who was always withering, about the era of the Revolution; and his Lear, we believe, was arranged in the year 1682. But the family to which he belongs is abundantly recorded in the Dunciad; and his own name will be found amongst its catalogues of heroes.

With respect to *the author of the "Tatler,"* a very different explanation is requisite. Steevens means the reader to understand Addison; but it does not follow that the particular paper in question was from his pen. Nothing, however, could be more natural than to quote from the common form of the play as then in possession of the stage. It was *there*, beyond a doubt, that a fine gentleman living upon town, and not professing any deep scholastic knowledge of literature (a light in which we are

always to regard the writers of the Spectator, Guardian, &c.), would be likely to have learned anything he quoted from Macbeth. This we say generally of the writers in those periodical papers; but, with reference to Addison in particular, it is time to correct the popular notion of his literary character, or at least to mark it by severer lines of distinction. It is already pretty well known, that Addison had no very intimate acquaintance with the literature of his own country. It is known also, that he did not think such an acquaintance any ways essential to the character of an elegant scholar and *littérateur*. Quite enough he found it, and more than enough for the time he had to spare, if he could maintain a tolerable familiarity with the foremost Latin poets, and a very slender one indeed with the Grecian. *How* slender, we can see in his "Travels." Of modern authors, none as yet had been published with notes, commentaries, or critical collations of the text; and, accordingly, Addison looked upon all of them, except those few who professed themselves followers in the retinue and equipage of the ancients, as creatures of a lower race. Boileau, as a mere imitator and propagator of Horace, he read, and probably little else, amongst the French classics. Hence it arose that he took upon himself to speak sneeringly of Tasso. To this, which was a bold act for his timid mind, he was emboldened by the countenance of Boileau. Of the elder Italian authors, such as Ariosto, and, *a fortiori*, Dante, he knew absolutely nothing. Passing to our own literature, it is certain that Addison was profoundly ignorant of Chaucer and of Spenser. Milton only,—and why? simply because he was a brilliant scholar, and stands like a bridge

between the Christian literature and the Pagan,—Addison had read and esteemed. There was also in the very constitution of Milton's mind, in the majestic regularity and planetary solemnity of its *epic* movements, something which he could understand and appreciate: as to the meteoric and incalculable eccentricities of the *dramatic* mind, as it displayed itself in the heroic age of our drama, amongst the Titans of 1590–1630, they confounded and overwhelmed him.

In particular, with regard to Shakspeare, we shall now proclaim a discovery which we made some twenty years ago. We, like others, from seeing frequent references to Shakspeare in the "Spectator," had acquiesced in the common belief, that, although Addison was no doubt profoundly unlearned in Shakspeare's language, and thoroughly unable to do him justice (and this we might well assume, since his great rival Pope, who had expressly studied Shakspeare, was, after all, so memorably deficient in the appropriate knowledge),—yet, that of course he had a vague popular knowledge of the mighty poet's cardinal dramas. Accident only led us into a discovery of our mistake. Twice or thrice we had observed, that if Shakspeare were quoted, that paper turned out not to be Addison's; and at length, by express examination, we ascertained the curious fact, that Addison has never in one instance quoted or made any reference to Shakspeare. But was this, as Steevens most disingenuously pretends, to be taken as an exponent of the public feeling towards Shakspeare? Was Addison's neglect representative of a general neglect? If so, whence came Rowe's edition, Pope's, Theobald's, Sir Thomas Hanmer's, Bishop War-

burton's, all upon the heels of one another? With such facts staring him in the face, how shameless must be that critic who could, in support of such a thesis, refer to "*the author of the 'Tatler,'*" contemporary with all these editors. The truth is, Addison was well aware of Shakspeare's hold on the popular mind; too well aware of it. The feeble constitution of the poetic faculty, as existing in himself, forbade his sympathising with Shakspeare; the proportions were too colossal for his delicate vision; and yet, as one who sought popularity himself, he durst not shock what perhaps he viewed as a national prejudice. Those who have happened, like ourselves, to see the effect of passionate music and "deep-inwoven harmonics" upon the feeling of an idiot,* may conceive what we mean. Such music does not utterly revolt the idiot; on the contrary, it has a strange but a horrid fascination for him: it alarms, irritates, disturbs, makes him profoundly unhappy; and chiefly by unlocking imperfect glimpses of thoughts and slumbering instincts, which it is for his peace to have entirely obscured, because for him they can be revealed only partially, and with the sad effect of throwing a baleful gleam upon his blighted condition. Do we mean, then, to compare Addison with an idiot? Not generally, by any means. Nobody can more sincerely admire him where he was a man of real genius,—viz., in his delineations of character and manners, or in the exquisite delicacies of his humour. But assuredly

* A great modern poet refers to this very case of music entering "the mouldy chambers of the dull idiot's brain;" but in support of what seems to us a baseless hypothesis.

Addison, as a poet, was amongst the sons of the feeble; and between the authors of Cato and of King Lear there was a gulf never to be bridged over.*

But Dryden, we are told, pronounced Shakspeare already in *his* day "*a little obsolete.*" Here, now, we have wilful, deliberate falsehood. *Obsolete*, in Dryden's meaning, does not imply that he was so with regard to his popularity (the question then at issue), but with regard to his diction and choice of words. To cite Dryden as a witness for any purpose against Shakspeare, —Dryden, who of all men had the most ransacked wit and exhausted language in celebrating the supremacy of Shakspeare's genius, does indeed require as much shamelessness in feeling as mendacity in principle.

But then Lord Shaftesbury, who may be taken as half way between Dryden and Pope (Dryden died in 1700, Pope was then twelve years old, and Lord S. wrote chiefly, we believe, between 1700 and 1710), "complains," it seems, "of his rude unpolished style, and his antiquated phrase and wit." What if he does? Let the whole truth be told, and then we shall see how much stress is to be laid upon such a judgment. The second Lord Shaftesbury, the author of the "Characteristics," was the grandson of that famous political agitator, the Chancellor Shaftesbury, who passed his whole life in

* Probably Addison's fear of the national feeling was a good deal strengthened by his awe of Milton and of Dryden, both of whom had expressed a homage towards Shakspeare which language cannot transcend. Amongst his political friends, also, were many intense admirers of Shakspeare.

storms of his own creation. The second Lord Shaftesbury was a man of crazy constitution, querulous from ill health, and had received an eccentric education from his eccentric grandfather. He was practised daily in *talking* Latin, to which afterwards he added a competent study of the Greek; and finally, he became unusually learned for his rank, but the most absolute and undistinguishing pedant that perhaps literature has to show. He sneers continually at the regular-built academic pedant; but he himself, though no academic, was essentially the very impersonation of pedantry. No thought however beautiful, no image however magnificent, could conciliate his praise as long as it was clothed in English; but present him with the most trivial common-places in Greek, and he unaffectedly fancied them divine; mistaking the pleasurable sense of his own power in a difficult and rare accomplishment for some peculiar force or beauty in the passage. Such was the outline of his literary taste. And was it upon Shakspeare only, or upon him chiefly, that he lavished his pedantry? Far from it. He attacked Milton with no less fervour; he attacked Dryden with a thousand times more. Jeremy Taylor he quoted only to ridicule; and even Locke, the confidential friend of his grandfather, he never alludes to without a sneer. As to Shakspeare, so far from Lord Shaftesbury's censures arguing his deficient reputation, the very fact of his noticing him at all proves his enormous popularity; for upon system he noticed those only who ruled the public taste. The insipidity of his objections to Shakspeare may be judged from this, that he comments in a spirit of absolute puerility upon the name *Desdemona*, as though

intentionally formed from the Greek word for *superstition*. In fact, he had evidently read little beyond the list of names in Shakspeare; yet there is proof enough that the irresistible beauty of what little he *had* read was too much for all his pedantry, and startled him exceedingly; for ever afterwards he speaks of Shakspeare as one who, with a little aid from Grecian sources, really had something great and promising about him. As to modern authors, neither this Lord Shaftesbury nor Addison read anything for the latter years of their life but Bayle's Dictionary. And most of the little scintillations of erudition which may be found in the notes to the "Characteristics," and in the Essays of Addison, are derived, almost without exception, and uniformly without acknowledgment, from Bayle.*

Finally, with regard to the sweeping assertion, that "for nearly a hundred years after his death Shakspeare was almost entirely neglected," we shall meet this scandalous falsehood by a rapid view of his fortunes during the century in question. The tradition has always been, that Shakspeare was honoured by the especial notice of Queen Elizabeth, as well as by that of James I. At one time we were disposed to question the truth of this tra-

* He who is weak enough to kick and spurn his own native literature, even if it were done with more knowledge than is shown by Lord Shaftesbury, will usually be kicked and spurned in his turn; and accordingly it has been often remarked, that the "Characteristics" are unjustly neglected in our days. For Lord Shaftesbury, with all his pedantry, was a man of great talents. Leibnitz had the sagacity to see this through the mists of a translation.

dition; but that was for want of having read attentively the lines of Ben Jonson to the memory of Shakspeare,—those generous lines which have so absurdly been taxed with faint praise. Jonson could make no mistake on this point: he, as one of Shakspeare's familiar companions, must have witnessed at the very time, and accompanied with friendly sympathy every motion of royal favour towards Shakspeare. Now he, in words which leave no room for doubt, exclaims—

> Sweet swan of Avon! what a sight it were
> To see thee in our waters yet appear,
> And make those flights upon the banks of Thames
> *That so did take Eliza and our James.*

These princes, then, *were* taken, were fascinated, with some of Shakspeare's dramas. In Elizabeth the approbation would probably be sincere. In James we can readily suppose it to have been assumed; for he was a pedant in a different sense from Lord Shaftesbury; not from undervaluing modern poetry, but from caring little or nothing for any poetry, although he wrote about its mechanic rules. Still the royal *imprimatur* would be influential and serviceable no less when offered hypocritically than in full sincerity. Next let us consider, at the very moment of Shakspeare's death, who were the leaders of the British youth, the *principes juventutis*, in the two fields, equally important to a great poet's fame, of rank and of genius? The Prince of Wales and John Milton; the first being then about sixteen years old, the other about eight. Now these two great powers, as we may call them, these presiding stars over all that was English in thought and action, were both impassioned admirers of

Shakspeare. Each of them counts for many thousands. The Prince of Wales* had learned to appreciate Shakspeare, not originally from reading him, but from witnessing the court representations of his plays at Whitehall. Afterwards we know that he made Shakspeare his closet companion, for he was reproached with doing so by Milton. And we know also, from the just criticism pronounced upon the character and diction of Caliban by one of Charles's confidential counsellors, Lord Falkland, that the king's admiration of Shakspeare had impressed a determination upon the court reading. As to Milton, by double prejudices, puritanical and classical, his mind had been preoccupied against the full impressions of Shakspeare. And we know that there is such a thing as keeping the sympathies of love and admiration in a dormant state, or state of abeyance; an effort of self-conquest realized in more cases than one by the ancient

* Perhaps the most bitter political enemy of Charles I. will have the candour to allow that, for a prince of those times, he was truly and eminently accomplished. His knowledge of the arts was considerable; and, as a patron of art, he stands foremost amongst all British sovereigns to this hour. He said truly of himself, and wisely as to the principle, that he understood English law as well as a gentleman ought to understand it; meaning that an attorney's minute knowledge of forms and technical niceties was illiberal. Speaking of him as an author, we must remember that the *Eikon Basiliké* is still unappropriated; that question is still open. But supposing the king's claim negatived, still, in his controversy with Henderson, in his negotiations at the Isle of Wight and elsewhere, he discovered a power of argument, a learning, and a strength of memory, which are truly admirable, whilst the whole of his accomplishments are recommended by a modesty and a humility as rare as they are unaffected.

fathers, both Greek and Latin, with regard to the profane classics. Intellectually they admired, and would not belie their admiration; but they did not give their hearts cordially, they did not abandon themselves to their natural impulses. They averted their eyes and weaned their attention from the dazzling object. Such, probably, was Milton's state of feeling towards Shakspeare after 1642, when the theatres were suppressed, and the fanatical fervour in its noontide heat. Yet even then he did not belie his reverence intellectually for Shakspeare; and in his younger days we know that he had spoken more enthusiastically of Shakspeare than he ever did again of any uninspired author. Not only did he address a sonnet to his memory, in which he declares that kings would wish to die, if by dying they could obtain such a monument in the hearts of men; but he also speaks of him in his *Il Penseroso* as the tutelary genius of the English stage. In this transmission of the torch (λαμπαδοφορια) Dryden succeeds to Milton; he was born nearly thirty years later; about thirty years they were contemporaries; and by thirty years, or nearly, Dryden survived his great leader. Dryden, in fact, lived out the seventeenth century. And we have now arrived within nine years of the era when the critical editions started in hot succession to one another. The names we have mentioned were the great influential names of the century. But of inferior homage there was no end. How came Betterton the actor, how came Davenant, how came Rowe, or Pope, by their intense (if not always sound) admiration for Shakspeare, unless they had found it fuming upwards like incense to the Pagan deities in ancient times from

altars erected at every turning upon all the paths of men?

But it is objected that inferior dramatists were sometimes preferred to Shakspeare; and again, that vile travesties of Shakspeare were preferred to the authentic dramas. As to the first argument, let it be remembered, that if the saints of the chapel are always in the same honour, because *there* men are simply discharging a duty, which once due will be due for ever; the saints of the theatre, on the other hand, must bend to the local genius, and to the very reasons for having a theatre at all. Men go thither for amusement: this is the paramount purpose; and even acknowledged merit or absolute superiority must give way to it. Does a man at Paris expect to see Molière reproduced in proportion to his admitted precedency in the French drama? On the contrary, that very precedency argues such a familiarization with his works, that those who are in quest of relaxation will reasonably prefer any recent drama to that which, having lost all its novelty, has lost much of its excitement. We speak of ordinary minds; but in cases of *public* entertainments, deriving part of their power from scenery and stage pomp, novelty is for all minds an essential condition of attraction. Moreover, in some departments of the comic, Beaumont and Fletcher, when writing in combination, really had a freedom and breadth of manner which excels the comedy of Shakspeare. As to the altered Shakspeare as taking precedency of the genuine Shakspeare, no argument can be so frivolous. The public were never allowed a choice; the great majority of an audience even now cannot be expected to carry the real Shakspeare in

their mind, so as to pursue a comparison between that and the alteration. Their comparisons must be exclusively amongst what they have opportunities of seeing; that is, between the various pieces presented to them by the managers of theatres. Further than this it is impossible for them to extend their office of judging and collating; and the degenerate taste which substituted the caprices of Davenant, the rants of Dryden, or the filth of Tate, for the jewellery of Shakspeare, cannot with any justice be charged upon the public, not one in a thousand of whom was furnished with any means of comparing, but exclusively upon those (viz., theatrical managers) who had the very amplest. Yet even in excuse for *them* much may be said. The very length of some plays compelled them to make alterations. The best of Shakspeare's dramas, King Lear, is the least fitted for representation; and, even for the vilest alteration, it ought in candour to be considered that possession is nine points of the law. He who would not have introduced, was often obliged to retain.

Finally, it is urged, that the small number of editions through which Shakspeare passed in the seventeenth century, furnishes a separate argument, and a conclusive one, against his popularity. We answer, that, considering the bulk of his plays collectively, the editions were *not* few: compared with any known case, the copies sold of Shakspeare were quite as many as could be expected under the circumstances. Ten or fifteen times as much consideration went to the purchase of one great folio like Shakspeare, as would attend the purchase of a little volume like Waller or Donne. Without reviews, or newspapers.

or advertisements to diffuse the knowledge of books, the progress of literature was necessarily slow, and its expansion narrow. But this is a topic which has always been treated unfairly, not with regard to Shakspeare only, but to Milton, as well as many others. The truth is, we have not facts enough to guide us; for the number of editions often tells nothing accurately as to the number of copies. With respect to Shakspeare it is certain, that, had his masterpieces been gathered into small volumes, Shakspeare would have had a most extensive sale. As it was, there can be no doubt, that from his own generation, throughout the seventeenth century, and until the eighteenth began to accommodate, not any greater popularity in *him*, but a greater taste for reading in the public, his fame never ceased to be viewed as a national trophy of honour; and the most illustrious men of the seventeenth century were no whit less fervent in their admiration than those of the eighteenth and the nineteenth, either as respected its strength and sincerity, or as respected its open profession.*

It is therefore a false notion, that the general sympathy with the merits of Shakspeare ever beat with a languid or intermitting pulse. Undoubtedly, in times when the functions of critical journals and of newspapers were not at hand to diffuse or to strengthen the impressions which emanated from the capital, all opinions must have travelled slowly into the provinces. But even then, whilst the perfect organs of communication were wanting, indirect substitutes were supplied by the necessities of the times, or by the instincts of political zeal. Two channels especially

* See note, p. 93

lay open between the great central organ of the national mind, and the remotest provinces. Parliaments were occasionally summoned (for the judges' circuits were too brief to produce much effect); and during their longest suspensions, the nobility, with large retinues, continually resorted to the court. But an intercourse more constant and more comprehensive was maintained through the agency of the two universities. Already, in the time of James I., the growing importance of the gentry, and the consequent birth of a new interest in political questions, had begun to express itself at Oxford, and still more so at Cambridge. Academic persons stationed themselves as sentinels at London, for the purpose of watching the court and the course of public affairs. These persons wrote letters, like those of the celebrated Joseph Mede, which we find in Ellis's Historical Collections, reporting to their fellow-collegians all the novelties of public life as they arose, or personally carried down such reports, and thus conducted the general feelings at the centre into lesser centres, from which again they were diffused into the ten thousand parishes of England; for (with a very few exceptions in favour of poor benefices, Welch or Cumbrian), every parish priest must unavoidably have spent his three years at one or other of the English universities. And by this mode of diffusion it is that we can explain the strength with which Shakspeare's thoughts and diction impressed themselves from a very early period upon the national literature, and even more generally upon the national thinking and conversation.*

* One of the profoundest tests by which we can measure the congeniality of an author with the national genius and temper, is the

The question therefore revolves upon us in threefold difficulty. How, having stepped thus prematurely into this inheritance of fame, leaping, as it were, thus abruptly into the favour alike of princes and the enemies of princes, had it become possible that in his native place (honoured still more in the final testimonies of his preference when founding a family mansion), such a man's history, and the personal recollections which cling so affectionately to the great intellectual potentates who have recommended themselves by gracious manners, could so soon and so utterly have been obliterated?

Malone, with childish irreflection, ascribes the loss of such memorials to the want of enthusiasm in his admirers. Local researches into private history had not then commenced. Such a taste, often petty enough in its management, was the growth of after-ages. Else how came Spenser's life and fortunes to be so utterly overwhelmed in oblivion? No poet of a high order could be more popular.

The answer we believe to be this: Twenty-six years after Shakspeare's death commenced the great parliamen-

degree in which his thoughts or his phrases interweave themselves with our daily conversation, and pass into the currency of the language. *Few French authors, if any, have imparted one phrase to the colloquial idiom;* with respect to Shakspeare, a large dictionary might be made of such phrases as "win golden opinions," "in my mind's eye," "patience on a monument," "o'erstep the modesty of nature," "more honour'd in the breach than in the observance," "palmy state," "my poverty and not my will consents," and so forth, without end. This reinforcement of the general language, by aids from the mintage of Shakspeare, had already commenced in the seventeenth century.

tary war: this it was, and the local feuds arising to divide family from family, brother from brother, upon which we must charge the extinction of traditions and memorials, doubtless abundant up to that era. The parliamentary contest, it will be said, did not last above three years; the king's standard having been first raised at Nottingham in August 1642, and the battle of Naseby (which terminated the open warfare) having been fought in June 1645. Or even if we extend its duration to the surrender of the last garrison, that war terminated in the spring of 1646. And the brief explosions of insurrection or of Scottish invasion which occurred on subsequent occasions were all locally confined; and none came near to Warwickshire, except the battle of Worcester, more than five years after. This is true; but a short war will do much to efface recent and merely personal memorials. And the following circumstances of the war were even more important than the general fact.

First of all, the very mansion founded by Shakspeare became the military head-quarters for the queen in 1644, when marching from the eastern coast of England to join the king in Oxford; and one such special visitation would be likely to do more serious mischief in the way of extinction than many years of general warfare. Secondly, as a fact, perhaps, equally important, Birmingham, the chief town of Warwickshire, and the adjacent district, the seat of our hardware manufactures, was the very focus of disaffection towards the royal cause. Not only, therefore, would this whole region suffer more from internal and spontaneous agitation, but it would be the more frequently traversed vindictively from without, and harassed by fly-

ing parties from Oxford, or others of the king's garrisons. Thirdly, even apart from the political aspects of Warwickshire, this county happens to be the central one of England, as regards the roads between the north and south; and Birmingham has long been the great central axis,* in which all the radii from the four angles of England proper meet and intersect. Mere accident, therefore, of local position, much more when united with that avowed inveteracy of malignant feeling, which was bitter enough to rouse a reaction of bitterness in the mind of Lord Clarendon, would go far to account for the wreck of many memorials relating to Shakspeare, as well as for the subversion of that quiet and security for humble life, in which the traditional memory finds its best *nidus*. Thus we obtain one solution, and perhaps the main one, of the otherwise mysterious oblivion which had swept away all traces of the mighty poet, by the time when those quiet days revolved upon England, in which again the solitary agent of learned research might roam in security from house to house, gleaning those personal remembrances which, even in the fury of civil strife, might long have lingered by the chimney corner. But the fierce furnace of war had probably, by its *local* ravages, scorched this field of natural tradition, and thinned the gleaner's inheritance by three parts

* In fact, by way of representing to himself the system or scheme of the English roads, the reader has only to imagine one great letter X, or a St Andrew's cross, laid down from north to south, and decussating at Birmingham. Even Coventry, which makes a slight variation for one or two roads, and so far disturbs this decussation, by shifting it eastwards, is still in Warwickshire.

out of four. This, we repeat, may be one part of the solution to this difficult problem.

And if another is still demanded, possibly it may be found in the fact, hostile to the perfect consecration of Shakspeare's memory, that after all he was a player. Many a coarse-minded country gentleman, or village pastor, who would have held his town glorified by the distinction of having sent forth a great judge or an eminent bishop, might disdain to cherish the personal recollections which surrounded one whom custom regarded as little above a mountebank, and the illiberal law as a vagabond. The same degrading appreciation attached both to the actor in plays and to their author. The contemptuous appellation of "play-book," served as readily to degrade the mighty volume which contained Lear and Hamlet, as that of "play-actor," or "player-man," has always served with the illiberal or the fanatical to dishonour the persons of Roscius or of Garrick, of Talma or of Siddons. Nobody, indeed, was better aware of this than the noble-minded Shakspeare; and feelingly he has breathed forth in his sonnets this conscious oppression under which he lay of public opinion, unfavourable by a double title to his own pretensions; for, being both dramatic author and dramatic performer, he found himself heir to a twofold opprobrium, and at an era of English society when the weight of that opprobrium was heaviest. In reality, there was at this period a collision of forces acting in opposite directions upon the estimation of the stage and scenical art, and therefore of all the ministers in its equipage. Puritanism frowned upon these pursuits, as ruinous to public morals: on the other hand, loyalty could not but tolerate what

was patronized by the sovereign; and it happened that Elizabeth, James, and Charles I., were all alike lovers and promoters of theatrical amusements, which were indeed more indispensable to the relief of court ceremony, and the monotony of aulic pomp, than in any other region of life. This royal support, and the consciousness that any brilliant success in these arts implied an unusual share of natural endowments, did something in mitigation of a scorn which must else have been intolerable to all generous natures.

But whatever prejudice might thus operate against the perfect sanctity of Shakspeare's posthumous reputation, it is certain that the splendour of his worldly success must have done much to obliterate that effect; his admirable colloquial talents a good deal, and his gracious affability still more. The wonder therefore will still remain, that Betterton, in less than a century from his death, should have been able to glean so little. And for the solution of this wonder we must throw ourselves chiefly upon the explanations we have made as to the parliamentary war, and the local ravages of its progress in the very district, of the very town, and the very house.

If further arguments are still wanted to explain this mysterious abolition, we may refer the reader to the following succession of disastrous events, by which it should seem that a perfect malice of misfortune pursued the vestiges of the mighty poet's steps. In 1613, the Globe Theatre, with which he had been so long connected, was burned to the ground. Soon afterwards a great fire occurred in Stratford; and next (without counting upon the fire of London, just fifty years after his death, which,

however, would consume many an important record from periods far more remote), the house of Ben Jonson, in which probably, as Mr Campbell suggests, might be parts of his correspondence, was also burned. Finally, there was an old tradition that Lady Barnard, the sole granddaughter of Shakspeare, had carried off many of his papers from Stratford; and these papers have never since been traced.

In many of the elder Lives it has been asserted, that John Shakspeare, the father of the poet, was a butcher, and in others that he was a woolstapler. It is now settled beyond dispute that he was a glover. This was his professed occupation in Stratford, though it is certain that, with this leading trade, from which he took his denomination, he combined some collateral pursuits; and it is possible enough that, as openings offered, he may have meddled with many. In that age, and in a provincial town, nothing like the exquisite subdivision of labour was attempted which we now see realized in the great cities of Christendom. And one trade is often found to play into another with so much reciprocal advantage, that even in our own days we do not much wonder at an enterprising man, in country places, who combines several in his own person. Accordingly, John Shakspeare is known to have united with his town calling the rural and miscellaneous occupations of a farmer.

Meantime his avowed business stood upon a very different footing from the same trade as it is exercised in modern times. Gloves were in that age an article of dress more costly by much, and more elaborately decorated, than in our own. They were a customary present from some

cities to the judges of assize, and to other official persons —a custom of ancient standing, and in some places, we believe, still subsisting; and in such cases it is reasonable to suppose that the gloves must originally have been more valuable than the trivial modern article of the same name. So also, perhaps, in their origin, of the gloves given at funerals. In reality, whenever the simplicity of an age makes it difficult to renew the parts of a wardrobe except in capital towns of difficult access, prudence suggests that such wares should be manufactured of more durable materials; and, being so, they become obviously susceptible of more lavish ornament. But it will not follow, from this essential difference in the gloves of Shakspeare's age, that the glover's occupation was more lucrative. Doubtless he sold more costly gloves, and upon each pair had a larger profit; but for that very reason he sold fewer. Two or three gentlemen "of worship" in the neighbourhood might occasionally require a pair of gloves, but it is very doubtful whether any inhabitant of Stratford would ever call for so mere a luxury.

The practical result, at all events, of John Shakspeare's various pursuits does not appear permanently to have met the demands of his establishment; and in his maturer years there are indications still surviving that he was under a cloud of embarrassment. He certainly lost at one time his social position in the town of Stratford; but there is a strong presumption, in *our* construction of the case, that he finally retrieved it; and for this retrieval of a station which he had forfeited by personal misfortunes or neglect, he was altogether indebted to the filial piety of his immortal son.

Meantime the earlier years of the elder Shakspeare wore the aspect of rising prosperity, however unsound might be the basis on which it rested. There can be little doubt that William Shakspeare, from his birth up to his tenth or perhaps his eleventh year, lived in careless plenty, and saw nothing in his father's house but that style of liberal housekeeping which has ever distinguished the upper yeomanry and the rural gentry of England. Probable enough it is that the resources for meeting this liberality were not strictly commensurate with the family income, but were sometimes allowed to entrench, by means of loans or mortgages, upon capital funds. The stress upon the family finances was perhaps at times severe; and that it was borne at all, must be imputed to the large and even splendid portion which John Shakspeare received with his wife.

This lady, for such she really was in an eminent sense, by birth as well as by connections, bore the beautiful name of Mary Arden, a name derived from the ancient forest district* of the county; and doubtless she merits a more elaborate notice than our slender materials will furnish. To have been *the mother of Shakspeare*,—how august a title to the reverence of infinite generations, and of centuries beyond the vision of prophecy. A plausible hypothesis has been started in modern times, that the facial structure, and that the intellectual conformation,

* And probably so called by some remote ancestor who had emigrated from the forest of Ardennes, in the Netherlands, and *now* for ever memorable to English ears from its proximity to Waterloo.

may be deduced more frequently from the corresponding characteristics in the mother than in the father. It is certain that no very great man has ever existed, but that his greatness has been rehearsed and predicted in one or other of his parents. And it cannot be denied, that in the most eminent men, where we have had the means of pursuing the investigation, the mother has more frequently been repeated and reproduced than the father. We have known cases where the mother has furnished all the intellect, and the father all the moral sensibility; upon which assumption, the wonder ceases that Cicero, Lord Chesterfield, and other brilliant men, who took the utmost pains with their sons, should have failed so conspicuously; for possibly the mothers had been women of excessive and even exemplary stupidity. In the case of Shakspeare, each parent, if we had any means of recovering their characteristics, could not fail to furnish a study of the most profound interest; and with regard to his mother in particular, if the modern hypothesis be true, and if we are indeed to deduce from *her* the stupendous intellect of her son, in that case she must have been a benefactress to her husband's family beyond the promises of fairyland or the dreams of romance; for it is certain that to her chiefly this family was also indebted for their worldly comfort.

Mary Arden was the youngest daughter and the heiress of Robert Arden of Wilmecote, Esq., in the county of Warwick. The family of Arden was even then of great antiquity. About one century and a quarter before the birth of William Shakspeare, a person bearing the same name as his maternal grandfather had been returned by

the commissioners in their list of the Warwickshire gentry; he was there styled Robert Arden, Esq. of Bromich. This was in 1433, or the 12th year of Henry VI. In Henry VII.'s reign, the Ardens received a grant of lands from the crown; and in 1568, four years after the birth of William Shakspeare, Edward Arden, of the same family, was sheriff of the county. Mary Arden was therefore a young lady of excellent descent and connections, and an heiress of considerable wealth. She brought to her husband, as a marriage portion, the landed estate of Asbies, which, upon any just valuation, must be considered as a handsome dowry for a woman of her station. As this point has been contested, and as it goes a great way towards determining the exact social position of the poet's parents, let us be excused for sifting it a little more narrowly than might else seem warranted by the proportions of our present life. Every question which it can be reasonable to raise at all, it must be reasonable to treat with at least so much of minute research as may justify the conclusions which it is made to support.

The estate of Asbies contained fifty acres of arable land, six of meadow, and a right of commonage. What may we assume to have been the value of its fee-simple? Malone, who allows the total fortune of Mary Arden to have been L.110, 13s. 4d., is sure that the value of Asbies could not have been more than one hundred pounds. But why? Because, says he, the "average" rent of land at that time was no more than three shillings per acre. This we deny; but upon that assumption, the total yearly rent of fifty-six acres would be exactly eight

guineas.* And therefore, in assigning the value of Asbies at one hundred pounds, it appears that Malone must have estimated the land at no more than twelve years' purchase, which would carry the value to L.100, 16s. "Even at this estimate," as the latest annotator† on this subject *justly* observes, "Mary Arden's portion was a larger one than was usually given to a landed gentleman's daughter." But this writer objects to Malone's principle of valuation. "We find," says he, "that John Shakspeare also farmed the meadow of Tugton, containing sixteen acres, at the rate of eleven shillings per acre. Now, what proof has Mr Malone adduced that the acres of Asbies were not as valuable as those of Tugton? And if they were so, the former estate must have been worth between three and

* Let not the reader impute to us the gross anachronism of making an estimate for Shakspeare's days in a coin which did not exist until a century, within a couple of years, after Shakspeare's birth, and did not settle to the value of twenty-one shillings until a century after his death. The nerve of such an anachronism would lie in putting the estimate into a mouth of that age. And this is precisely the blunder into which the foolish forger of Vortigern, &c., has fallen. He does not indeed directly mention guineas; but indirectly and virtually he does, by repeatedly giving us accounts imputed to Shakspearian contemporaries, in which the sum-total amounts to L.5, 5s.; or to L.26, 5s.; or, again, to L.17, 17s. 6d. A man is careful to subscribe L.14, 14s., and so forth. But how could such amounts have arisen unless under a secret reference to guineas, which were not in existence until Charles II.'s reign; and, moreover, to guineas at their final settlement by law into twenty-one shillings each, which did not take place until George I.'s reign.

† Thomas Campbell the poet, in his eloquent Remarks on the Life and Writings of William Shakspeare, prefixed to a popular edition of the poet's dramatic works. London, 1838.

four hundred pounds." In the main drift of his objections we concur with Mr Campbell. But as they are liable to some criticism, let us clear the ground of all plausible cavils, and then see what will be the result. Malone, had he been alive, would probably have answered, that Tugton was a farm specially privileged by nature; and that if any man contended for so unusual a rent as eleven shillings an acre for land not known to him, the *onus probandi* would lie upon *him*. Be it so; eleven shillings is certainly above the ordinary level of rent, but three shillings is below it. We contend, that for tolerably good land, situated advantageously, that is, with a ready access to good markets and good fairs, such as those of Coventry, Birmingham, Gloucester, Worcester, Shrewsbury, &c., one noble might be assumed as the annual rent; and that in such situations twenty years' purchase was not a valuation, even in Elizabeth's reign, very unusual. Let us, however, assume the rent at only five shillings, and land at sixteen years' purchase: upon this basis, the rent would be L.14, and the value of the fee-simple L.224. Now, if it were required to equate that sum with its present value, a very operose* calculation might be requisite. But contenting ourselves with the gross method of making such equations between 1560 and the current century, that is, multiplying by five, we shall find the capital value of the estate to be eleven hundred and twenty pounds, whilst the annual rent would be exactly seventy. But if the estate had been sold, and the purchase-money lent upon mortgage (the only safe

* See Note, p 95.

mode of investing money at that time), the annual interest would have reached L.28, equal to L.140 of modern money; for mortgages in Elizabeth's age readily produced ten per cent.

A woman who should bring at this day an annual income of L.140 to a provincial tradesman, living in a sort of *rus in urbe*, according to the simple fashions of rustic life, would assuredly be considered as an excellent match. And there can be little doubt that Mary Arden's dowry it was which, for some ten or a dozen years succeeding to his marriage, raised her husband to so much social consideration in Stratford. In 1550 John Shakspeare is supposed to have first settled in Stratford, having migrated from some other part of Warwickshire. In 1557 he married Mary Arden; in 1565, the year subsequent to the birth of his son William, his third child, he was elected one of the aldermen; and in the year 1568 he became first magistrate of the town, by the title of high bailiff. This year we may assume to have been that in which the prosperity of this family reached its zenith; for in this year it was, over and above the presumptions furnished by his civic honours, that he obtained a grant of arms from Clarencieux of the Heralds' College. On this occasion he declared himself worth five hundred pounds derived from his ancestors. And we really cannot understand the right by which critics, living nearly three centuries from his time, undertake to know his affairs better than himself, and to tax him with either inaccuracy or falsehood. No man would be at leisure to court heraldic honours when he knew himself to be embarrassed, or apprehended that he soon might be so. A

man whose anxieties had been fixed at all upon his daily livelihood would, by this chase after the aerial honours of heraldry, have made himself a butt for ridicule such as no fortitude could enable him to sustain.

In 1568, therefore, when his son William would be moving through his fifth year, John Shakspeare (now honoured by the designation of *Master*) would be found at times in the society of the neighbouring gentry. Ten years in advance of this period he was already in difficulties. But there is no proof that these difficulties had then reached a point of degradation, or of memorable distress. The sole positive indications of his decaying condition are, that in 1578 he received an exemption from the small weekly assessment levied upon the aldermen of Stratford for the relief of the poor; and that in the following year, 1579, he is found enrolled amongst the defaulters in the payment of taxes. The latter fact undoubtedly goes to prove that, like every man who is falling back in the world, he was occasionally in arrears. Paying taxes is not like the honours awarded or the processions regulated by Clarencieux: no man is ambitious of precedency there; and if a laggard pace in that duty is to be received as evidence of pauperism, nine-tenths of the English people might occasionally be classed as paupers. With respect to his liberation from the weekly assessment, that may bear a construction different from the one which it has received. This payment, which could never have been regarded as a burthen, not amounting to five pounds annually of our present money, may have been held up as an exponent of wealth and consideration; and John Shakspeare may have been required

to resign it as an honourable distinction, not suitable to the circumstances of an embarrassed man. Finally, the fact of his being indebted to Robert Sadler, a baker, in the sum of five pounds, and his being under the necessity of bringing a friend as security for the payment, proves nothing at all. There is not a town in Europe in which opulent men cannot be found that are backward in the payment of their debts. And the probability is, that Master Sadler acted like most people who, when they suppose a man to be going down in the world, feel their respect for him sensibly decaying, and think it wise to trample him under foot, provided only in that act of trampling they can squeeze out of him their own individual debt. Like that terrific chorus in Spohr's oratorio of St Paul, "*Stone him to death*" is the cry of the selfish and the illiberal amongst creditors, alike towards the just and the unjust amongst debtors.

It was the wise and beautiful prayer of Agar, "Give me neither poverty nor riches;" and, doubtless, for quiet, for peace, and the *latentis semita vitæ*, that is the happiest dispensation. But, perhaps, with a view to a school of discipline and of moral fortitude, it might be a more salutary prayer, "Give me riches *and* poverty, and afterwards neither." For the transitional state between riches and poverty will teach a lesson both as to the baseness and the goodness of human nature, and will impress that lesson with a searching force, such as no borrowed experience ever can approach. Most probable it is that Shakspeare drew some of his powerful scenes in the Timon of Athens, those which exhibit the vileness of ingratitude and the impassioned frenzy of misanthropy,

from his personal recollections connected with the case of his own father. Possibly, though a cloud of 270 years now veils it, this very Master Sadler, who was so urgent for his five pounds, and who so little apprehended that he should be called over the coals for it in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," may have sate for the portrait of that Lucullus who says of Timon—

> Alas, good lord! a noble gentleman 'tis, if he would not keep so good a house. Many a time and often I have dined with him, and told him on't; and come again to supper to him, of purpose to have him spend less: and yet he would embrace no counsel, take no warning by my coming. Every man has his fault, and honesty is his; I have told him on't, but I could never get him from it.

For certain years, perhaps, John Shakspeare moved on in darkness and sorrow—

> His familiars from his buried fortunes
> Slunk all away; left their false vows with him,
> Like empty purses pick'd: and his poor self,
> A dedicated beggar to the air,
> With his disease of all-shunn'd poverty,
> Walk'd, like contempt, alone.

We, however, at this day are chiefly interested in the case as it bears upon the education and youthful happiness of the poet. Now if we suppose that from 1568, the high noon of the family prosperity, to 1578, the first year of their mature embarrassments, one half the interval was passed in stationary sunshine, and the latter half in the gradual twilight of declension, it will follow that the young William had completed his tenth year before he heard the first signals of distress; and for so long a period his education would probably be conducted on as liberal

a scale as the resources of Stratford would allow. Through this earliest section of his life he would undoubtedly rank as a gentleman's son, possibly as the leader of his class in Stratford. But what rank he held through the next ten years, or, more generally, what was the standing in society of Shakspeare until he had created a new station for himself by his own exertions in the metropolis, is a question yet unsettled, but which has been debated as keenly as if it had some great dependencies. Upon this we shall observe, that could we by possibility be called to settle beforehand what rank were best for favouring the development of intellectual powers, the question might wear a face of deep practical importance; but when the question is simply as to a matter of fact, what *was* the rank held by a man whose intellectual development has long ago been completed, this becomes a mere question of curiosity. The tree has fallen; it is confessedly the noblest of all the forest; and we must therefore conclude that the soil in which it flourished was either the best possible, or, if not so, that anything bad in its properties had been disarmed and neutralized by the vital forces of the plant, or by the benignity of nature. If any future Shakspeare were likely to arise, it might be a problem of great interest to agitate, whether the condition of a poor man or of a gentleman were best fitted to nurse and stimulate his faculties. But for the actual Shakspeare, since what he was he was, and since nothing greater can be imagined, it is now become a matter of little moment whether his course lay for fifteen or twenty years through the humilities of absolute poverty, or through the chequered paths of gentry lying in the shade. Whatever

was, must, in this case at least, have been the best, since it terminated in producing Shakspeare; and thus far we must all be optimists.

Yet still, it will be urged, the curiosity is not illiberal which would seek to ascertain the precise career through which Shakspeare ran. This we readily concede; and we are anxious ourselves to contribute anything in our power to the settlement of a point so obscure. What we have wished to protest against is the spirit of partisanship in which this question has too generally been discussed. For, whilst some, with a foolish affectation of plebeian sympathies, overwhelm us with the insipid commonplaces about birth and ancient descent, as honours containing nothing meritorious, and rush eagerly into an ostentatious exhibition of all the circumstances which favour the notion of a humble station and humble connections; others, with equal forgetfulness of true dignity, plead with the intemperance and partiality of a legal advocate for the pretensions of Shakspeare to the hereditary rank of gentleman. Both parties violate the majesty of the subject. When we are seeking for the sources of the Euphrates or the St Lawrence, we look for no proportions to the mighty volume of waters in that particular summit amongst the chain of mountains which embosoms its earliest fountains, nor are we shocked at the obscurity of these fountains. Pursuing the career of Mahommed, or of any man who has memorably impressed his own mind or agency upon the revolutions of mankind, we feel solicitude about the circumstances which might surround his cradle to be altogether unseasonable and impertinent. Whether he were born in a hovel or a palace, whether he

passed his infancy in squalid poverty, or hedged around by the glittering spears of body-guards, as mere questions of fact may be interesting, but, in the light of either accessories or counter-agencies to the native majesty of the subject, are trivial and below all philosophic valuation. So with regard to the creator of Lear and Hamlet, of Othello and Macbeth; to him from whose golden urns the nations beyond the far Atlantic, the multitude of the isles, and the generations unborn in Australian climes, even to the realms of the rising sun (the ἀνατολαι ἡελιοιο), must in every age draw perennial streams of intellectual life, we feel that the little accidents of birth and social condition are so unspeakably below the grandeur of the theme, are so irrelevant and disproportioned to the real interest at issue, so incommensurable with any of its relations, that a biographer of Shakspeare at once denounces himself as below his subject if he can entertain such a question as seriously affecting the glory of the poet. In some legends of saints, we find that they were born with a lambent circle or golden areola about their heads. This angelic coronet shed light alike upon the chambers of a cottage or a palace, upon the gloomy limits of a dungeon or the vast expansion of a cathedral; but the cottage, the palace, the dungeon, the cathedral, were all equally incapable of adding one ray of colour or one pencil of light to the supernatural halo.

Having therefore thus pointedly guarded ourselves from misconstruction, and consenting to entertain the question as one in which we, the worshippers of Shakspeare, have an interest of curiosity, but in which he, the object of our worship, has no interest of glory, we proceed to state

what appears to us the result of the scanty facts surviving when collated with each other.

By his mother's side, Shakspeare was an authentic gentleman. By his father's he would have stood in a more dubious position; but the effect of municipal honours to raise and illustrate an equivocal rank has always been acknowledged under the popular tendencies of our English political system. From the sort of lead, therefore, which John Shakspeare took at one time amongst his fellow-townsmen, and from his rank of first magistrate, we may presume that, about the year 1568, he had placed himself at the head of the Stratford community. Afterwards he continued for some years to descend from this altitude; and the question is, at what point this gradual degradation may be supposed to have settled. Now we shall avow it as our opinion, that the composition of society in Stratford was such that, even had the Shakspeare family maintained their superiority, the main body of their daily associates must still have been found amongst persons below the rank of gentry. The poet must inevitably have mixed chiefly with mechanics and humble tradesmen, for such people composed perhaps the total community. But had there even been a gentry in Stratford, since they would have marked the distinctions of their rank chiefly by greater reserve of manners, it is probable that, after all, Shakspeare, with his enormity of delight in exhibitions of human nature, would have mostly cultivated that class of society in which the feelings are more elementary and simple, in which the thoughts speak a plainer language, and in which the restraints of factitious or conventional decorum are exchanged

for the restraints of mere sexual decency. It is a noticeable fact to all who have looked upon human life with an eye of strict attention, that the abstract image of womanhood, in its loveliness, its delicacy, and its modesty, nowhere makes itself more impressive or more advantageously felt than in the humblest cottages, because it is there brought into immediate juxtaposition with the grossness of manners and the careless license of language incident to the fathers and brothers of the house. And this is more especially true in a nation of unaffected sexual gallantry,* such as the English and the Gothic races in general; since, under the immunity which their women enjoy from all servile labours of a coarse or out-of-doors order, by as much lower as they descend in the scale of rank, by so much more do they benefit under the force of contrast with the men of their own level. A young man of that class, however noble in appearance, is somewhat degraded in the eyes of women, by the necessity which his indigence imposes of working under a master; but a beautiful young woman, in the very poorest family, unless she enters upon a life of domestic servitude (in which case her labours are light, suited to her sex, and withdrawn from the public eye), so long in fact as she stays under her father's roof, is as perfectly her own mistress and *sui juris* as the daughter of an earl. This personal dignity, brought into stronger relief by the mercenary employments of her male connections, and the feminine gentleness of her voice and manners, exhibited under the same advantages of contrast, oftentimes combine to make

* See Note, p. 96.

a young cottage beauty as fascinating an object as any woman of any station.

Hence we may in part account for the great event of Shakspeare's early manhood—his premature marriage. It has always been known, or at least traditionally received for a fact, that Shakspeare had married whilst yet a boy; and that his wife was unaccountably older than himself. In the very earliest biographical sketch of the poet, compiled by Rowe, from materials collected by Betterton the actor, it was stated (and that statement is now ascertained to have been correct), that he had married Anne Hathaway, "the daughter of a substantial yeoman." Further than this nothing was known. But in September 1836 was published a very remarkable document, which gives the assurance of law to the time and fact of this event, yet still, unless collated with another record, does nothing to lessen the mystery which had previously surrounded its circumstances. This document consists of two parts: the first, and principal, according to the logic of the case, though second according to the arrangement, being a *license* for the marriage of William Shakspeare with Anne Hathaway, under the condition "of *once* asking of the bannes of matrimony," that is, in effect, dispensing with two out of the three customary askings; the second or subordinate part of the document being a *bond* entered into by two sureties, viz., Fulke Sandells and John Rychardson, both described as *agricolæ* or yeomen, and both marksmen (that is, incapable of writing, and therefore subscribing by means of *marks*), for the payment of forty pounds sterling, in the event of Shakspeare, yet a minor, and incapable of binding himself, failing to fulfil the con-

ditions of the license. In the bond, drawn up in Latin, there is no mention of Shakspeare's name; but in the license, which is altogether English, *his* name, of course, stands foremost; and as it may gratify the reader to see the very words and orthography of the original, we here extract the *operative* part of this document, prefacing only, that the license is attached by way of explanation to the bond. "The condition of this obligation is suche, that if herafter there shall not appere any lawfull lett or impediment, by reason of any precontract, &c., but that Willm. Shagspere, one thone ptie" [on the one party], "and Anne Hathwey of Stratford, in the diocess of Worcester, maiden, may lawfully solemnize matrimony together; and in the same afterwards remaine and continew like man and wiffe. And, moreover, if the said Willm. Shagspere do not proceed to solemnization of mariadg with the said Anne Hathwey, without the consent of hir frinds;—then the said obligation" [viz., to pay forty pounds] "to be voyd and of none effect, or els to stand & abide in full force and vertue."

What are we to think of this document? Trepidation and anxiety are written upon its face. The parties are not to be married by a special license; not even by an ordinary license; in that case no proclamation of banns, no public asking at all, would have been requisite. Economical scruples are consulted; and yet the regular movement of the marriage "through the bell-ropes"* is dis-

* Amongst people of humble rank in England, who only were ever asked in church, until the new-fangled systems of marriage came up within the last ten or fifteen years, during the currency of the three Sundays on which the banns were proclaimed by the

turbed. Economy, which retards the marriage, is here evidently in collision with some opposite principle which precipitates it. How is all this to be explained? Much light is afforded by the date when illustrated by another document. The bond bears date on the 28th day of November in the 25th year of our lady the queen; that is, in 1582. Now the baptism of Shakspeare's eldest child, Susanna, is registered on the 26th of May in the year following. Suppose, therefore, that his marriage was solemnized on the 1st day of December: it was barely possible that it could be earlier, considering that the sureties, drinking, perhaps, at Worcester throughout the 28th of November, would require the 29th, in so dreary a season, for their return to Stratford; after which some preparation might be requisite to the bride, since the marriage was *not* celebrated at Stratford. Next suppose the birth of Miss Susanna to have occurred, like her father's, two days before her baptism, viz., on the 24th of May. From December the 1st to May the 24th, both days inclusively, are 175 days; which, divided by seven, gives precisely twenty-five weeks, that is to say, six months short by one week. Oh, fie, Miss Susanna! you came rather before you were wanted.

Mr Campbell's comment upon the affair is, that "*if* this was the case," viz., if the baptism were really solemnized on the 26th of May, "the poet's first child would *appear* to have been born only six months and eleven days after the bond was entered into." And he then

clergyman from the reading-desk, the young couple elect were said jocosely to be "hanging in the bell-ropes;" alluding perhaps to the joyous peal contingent on the final completion of the marriage.

concludes that, on this assumption, "Miss Susanna Shakspeare came into the world a little prematurely." But this is to doubt where there never was any ground for doubting; the baptism was *certainly* on the 26th of May; and, in the next place, the calculation of six months and eleven days is sustained by substituting lunar months for calendar, and then only by supposing the marriage to have been celebrated on the very day of subscribing the bond in Worcester, and the baptism to have been coincident with the birth; of which suppositions the latter is improbable, and the former, considering the situation of Worcester, impossible.

Strange it is, that, whilst all biographers have worked with so much zeal upon the most barren dates or most baseless traditions in the great poet's life, realising in a manner the chimeras of Laputa, and endeavouring "to extract sunbeams from cucumbers," such a story with regard to such an event, no fiction of village scandal, but involved in legal documents, a story so significant and so eloquent to the intelligent, should formerly have been dismissed without notice of any kind, and even now, after the discovery of 1836, with nothing beyond a slight conjectural insinuation. For our parts, we should have been the last amongst the biographers to unearth any forgotten scandal, or, after so vast a lapse of time, and when the grave had shut out all but charitable thoughts, to point any moral censures at a simple case of natural frailty, youthful precipitancy of passion, of all trespasses the most venial, where the final intentions are honourable. But in this case there seems to have been something more in motion than passion or the ardour of youth. "I like

not," says Parson Evans (alluding to Falstaff in masquerade), "I like not when a woman has a great peard; I spy a great peard under her muffler." Neither do we like the spectacle of a mature young woman, five years past her majority, wearing the semblance of having been led astray by a boy who had still two years and a half to run of his minority. Shakspeare himself, looking back on this part of his youthful history from his maturest years, breathes forth pathetic counsels against the errors into which his own inexperience had been ensnared. The disparity of years between himself and his wife he notices in a beautiful scene of the Twelfth Night. The Duke Orsino, observing the sensibility which the pretended Cesario had betrayed on hearing some touching old snatches of a love strain, swears that his beardless page must have felt the passion of love, which the other admits. Upon this the dialogue proceeds thus :—

Duke. What kind of woman is't?
Viola. Of your complexion.
Duke. She is not worth thee then :—What years?
Viola. I' faith,
About your years, my lord.
Duke. Too old, by heaven. *Let still the woman take*
An elder than herself: so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband's heart.
For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women's are.
Viola. I think it well, my lord.
Duke. Then *let thy love be younger than thyself,*
Or thy affection cannot hold the bent;
For women are as roses, whose fair flower,
Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour.

These counsels were uttered nearly twenty years after the event in his own life to which they probably look back; for this play is supposed to have been written in Shakspeare's thirty-eighth year. And we may read an earnestness in pressing the point as to the *inverted* disparity of years, which indicates pretty clearly an appeal to the lessons of his personal experience. But his other indiscretion, in having yielded so far to passion and opportunity as to crop by prelibation, and before they were hallowed, those flowers of paradise which belonged to his marriage-day; this he adverts to with even more solemnity of sorrow, and with more pointed energy of moral reproof, in the very last drama which is supposed to have proceeded from his pen, and therefore with the force and sanctity of testamentary counsel. The Tempest is all but ascertained to have been composed in 1611, that is, about five years before the poet's death; and indeed could not have been composed much earlier; for the very incident which suggested the basis of the plot, and of the local scene, viz., the shipwreck of Sir George Somers on the Bermudas (which were in consequence denominated the Somers' Islands), did not occur until the year 1609. In the opening of the fourth act, Prospero formally betrothes his daughter to Ferdinand; and in doing so he pays the prince a well-merited compliment of having "worthily purchas'd" this rich jewel, by the patience with which, for her sake, he had supported harsh usage, and other painful circumstances of his trial. But, he adds solemnly,

> If thou dost break her virgin knot before
> All sanctimonious ceremonies may
> With full and holy rite be minister'd;

in that case what would follow?

> No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall,
> To make this contract grow; *but barren hate,*
> *Sour-ey'd disdain and discord shall bestrew*
> *The union of your bed with weeds so loathly*
> *That you shall hate it both.* Therefore take heed,
> As Hymen's lamps shall light you.

The young prince assures him in reply, that no strength of opportunity, concurring with the uttermost temptation, not

> the murkiest den
> The most opportune place, the strong'st suggestion
> Our worser genius can———

should ever prevail to lay asleep his jealousy of self-control, so as to take any advantage of Miranda's innocence. And he adds an argument for this abstinence, by way of reminding Prospero, that not honour only, but even prudential care of his own happiness, is interested in the observance of his promise. Any unhallowed anticipation would, as he insinuates,

> Take away
> The edge of that day's celebration,
> When I shall think, or Phœbus' steeds are founder'd,
> Or night kept chain'd below;

that is, when even the winged hours would seem to move too slowly. Even thus Prospero is not quite satisfied: during his subsequent dialogue with Ariel, we are to suppose that Ferdinand, in conversing apart with Miranda, betrays more impassioned ardour than the wise magician altogether approves. The prince's caresses

have not been unobserved; and thus Prospero renews his warning:

> Look thou be true: do not give dalliance
> Too much the rein: the strongest oaths are straw
> To the fire i' the blood: be more abstemious,
> Or else—good night your vow.

The royal lover re-assures him of his loyalty to his engagements; and again the wise father, so honourably jealous for his daughter, professes himself satisfied with the prince's pledges.

Now in all these emphatic warnings, uttering the language "of that sad wisdom folly leaves behind," who can avoid reading, as in subtile hieroglyphics, the secret record of Shakspeare's own nuptial disappointments? We, indeed, that is, universal posterity through every age, have reason to rejoice in these disappointments; for to them, past all doubt, we are indebted for Shakspeare's subsequent migration to London, and his public occupation, which, giving him a deep pecuniary interest in the productions of his pen, such as no other literary application of his powers could have approached in that day, were eventually the means of drawing forth those divine works which have survived their author for our everlasting benefit.

Our own reading and deciphering of the whole case is as follows. The Shakspeares were a handsome family, both father and sons. This we assume upon the following grounds:—First, on the presumption arising out of John Shakspeare's having won the favour of a young heiress higher in rank than himself; secondly, on the presumption involved in the fact of three amongst his

four sons having gone upon the stage, to which the most obvious (and perhaps in those days a *sine qua non*) recommendation would be a good person and a pleasing countenance; thirdly, on the direct evidence of Aubrey, who assures us that William Shakspeare was a handsome and a well-shaped man; fourthly, on the implicit evidence of the Stratford monument, which exhibits a man of good figure and noble countenance; fifthly, on the confirmation of this evidence by the Chandos portrait, which exhibits noble features, illustrated by the utmost sweetness of expression; sixthly, on the selection of theatrical parts, which it is known that Shakspeare personated, most of them being such as required some dignity of form, viz., kings, the athletic (though aged) follower of an athletic young man, and supernatural beings. On these grounds, direct or circumstantial, we believe ourselves warranted in assuming that William Shakspeare was a handsome and even noble-looking boy. Miss Anne Hathaway had herself probably some personal attractions; and, if an indigent girl, who looked for no pecuniary advantages, would probably have been early sought in marriage. But as the daughter of "a substantial yeoman," who would expect some fortune in his daughter's suitors, she had, to speak coarsely, a little outlived her market. Time she had none to lose. William Shakspeare pleased her eye; and the gentleness of his nature made him an apt subject for female blandishments, possibly for female arts. Without imputing, however, to this Anne Hathaway anything so hateful as a settled plot for ensnaring him, it was easy enough for a mature woman, armed with such inevitable advantages of experience and of self-possession,

to draw onward a blushing novice; and, without directly creating opportunities, to place him in the way of turning to account such as naturally offered. Young boys are generally flattered by the condescending notice of grown-up women; and perhaps Shakspeare's own lines upon a similar situation, to a young boy adorned with the same natural gifts as himself, may give us the key to the result :—

> Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won;
> Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assail'd;
> And, when a woman woos, what woman's son
> Will sourly leave her till he have prevail'd?

Once, indeed, entangled in such a pursuit, any person of manly feelings would be sensible that he had no retreat; *that* would be—to insult a woman, grievously to wound her sexual pride, and to insure her lasting scorn and hatred. These were consequences which the gentle-minded Shakspeare could not face; he pursued his good fortunes, half perhaps in heedlessness, half in desperation, until he was roused by the clamorous displeasure of her family upon first discovering the situation of their kinswoman. For such a situation there could be but one atonement, and that was hurried forward by both parties; whilst, out of delicacy towards the bride, the wedding was not celebrated in Stratford (where the register contains no notice of such an event); nor, as Malone imagined, in Weston-upon-Avon, that being in the diocese of Gloucester; but in some parish, as yet undiscovered, in the diocese of Worcester.

But now arose a serious question as to the future maintenance of the young people. John Shakspeare was de-

pressed in his circumstances, and he had other children besides William, viz., three sons and a daughter. The elder Lives have represented him as burdened with ten; but this was an error, arising out of the confusion between John Shakspeare the glover and John Shakspeare a shoemaker. This error has been thus far of use, that, by exposing the fact of two John Shakspeares (not kinsmen) residing in Stratford-upon-Avon, it has satisfactorily proved the name to be amongst those which are locally indigenous to Warwickshire. Meantime it is now ascertained that John Shakspeare the glover had only eight children, viz., four daughters and four sons. The order of their succession was this:—Joan, Margaret, WILLIAM, Gilbert, a second Joan, Anne, Richard, and Edmund. Three of the daughters, viz., the two eldest of the family, Joan and Margaret, together with Anne, died in childhood: all the rest attained mature ages, and of these William was the eldest. This might give him some advantage in his father's regard; but in a question of pecuniary provision precedency amongst the children of an insolvent is nearly nominal. For the present John Shakspeare could do little for his son; and, under these circumstances, perhaps the father of Anne Hathaway would come forward to assist the new-married couple. This condition of dependency would furnish matter for painful feelings and irritating words: the youthful husband, whose mind would be expanding as rapidly as the leaves and blossoms of spring-time in polar latitudes, would soon come to appreciate the sort of wiles by which he had been caught. The female mind is quick, and almost gifted with the power of witchcraft, to decipher what is passing in the

thoughts of familiar companions. Silent and forbearing as William Shakspeare might be, Anne, his staid wife, would read his secret reproaches; ill would she dissemble her wrath, and the less so from the consciousness of having deserved them. It is no uncommon case for women to feel anger in connection with one subject, and to express it in connection with another; which other, perhaps (except as a serviceable mask), would have been a matter of indifference to their feelings. Anne would therefore reply to those inevitable reproaches which her own sense must presume to be lurking in her husband's heart, by others equally stinging, on his inability to support his family, and on his obligations to her father's purse. Shakspeare, we may be sure, would be ruminating every hour on the means of his deliverance from so painful a dependency; and at length, after four years' conjugal discord, he would resolve upon that plan of solitary emigration to the metropolis, which, at the same time that it released him from the humiliation of domestic feuds, succeeded so splendidly for his worldly prosperity, and with a train of consequences so vast for all future ages.

Such, we are persuaded, was the real course of Shakspeare's transition from school-boy pursuits to his public career: and upon the known temperament of Shakspeare, his genial disposition to enjoy life without disturbing his enjoyment by fretting anxieties, we build the conclusion, that had his friends furnished him with ampler funds, and had his marriage been well assorted or happy, we—the world of posterity—should have lost the whole benefit and delight which we have since reaped from his matchless faculties. The motives which drove him *from*

Stratford are clear enough; but what motives determined his course *to* London, and especially to the stage, still remains to be explained. Stratford-upon-Avon, lying in the high road from London through Oxford to Birmingham (or more generally to the north), had been continually visited by some of the best comedians during Shakspeare's childhood. One or two of the most respectable metropolitan actors were natives of Stratford. These would be well known to the elder Shakspeare. But, apart from that accident, it is notorious that mere legal necessity and usage would compel all companies of actors, upon coming into any town, to seek, in the first place, from the chief magistrate, a license for opening a theatre, and next, over and above this public sanction, to seek his personal favour and patronage. As an alderman, therefore, but still more whilst clothed with the official powers of chief magistrate, the poet's father would have opportunities of doing essential services to many persons connected with the London stage. The conversation of comedians acquainted with books, fresh from the keen and sparkling circles of the metropolis, and filled with racy anecdotes of the court, as well as of public life generally, could not but have been fascinating by comparison with the stagnant society of Stratford. Hospitalities on a liberal scale would be offered to these men: not impossibly this fact might be one principal key to those dilapidations which the family estate had suffered. These actors, on *their* part, would retain a grateful sense of the kindness they had received, and would seek to repay it to John Shakspeare, now that he was depressed in his fortunes, as opportunities might offer. His eldest son,

growing up a handsome young man, and beyond all doubt from his earliest days of most splendid colloquial powers (for assuredly of *him* it may be taken for granted,

Nec licuit populis parvum te, Nile, videre),

would be often reproached in a friendly way for burying himself in a country life. These overtures, prompted alike by gratitude to the father, and a real selfish interest in the talents of the son, would at length take a definite shape; and, upon some clear understanding as to the terms of such an arrangement, William Shakspeare would at length (about 1586, according to the received account, that is, in the fifth year of his married life, and the twenty-third or twenty-fourth of his age), unaccompanied by wife or children, translate himself to London. Later than 1586 it could not well be; for already in 1589 it has been recently ascertained that he held a share in the property of a leading theatre.

We must here stop to notice, and the reader will allow us to notice with summary indignation, the slanderous and idle tale which represents Shakspeare as having fled to London in the character of a criminal, from the persecutions of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecot. This tale has long been propagated under two separate impulses: chiefly, perhaps, under the vulgar love of pointed and glaring contrasts; the splendour of the man was in this instance brought into a sort of epigrammatic antithesis with the humility of his fortunes; secondly, under a baser impulse, the malicious pleasure of seeing a great man degraded. Accordingly, as in the case of Milton,*

* See Note, p. 97.

it has been affirmed that Shakspeare had suffered corporal chastisement; in fact (we abhor to utter such words), that he had been judicially whipped. Now, first of all, let us mark the inconsistency of this tale: the poet was whipped, that is, he was punished most disproportionately, and yet he fled to avoid punishment. Next, we are informed that his offence was deer-stealing, and from the park of Sir Thomas Lucy. And it has been well ascertained that Sir Thomas had no deer, and had no park. Moreover, deer-stealing was regarded by our ancestors exactly as poaching is regarded by us. Deer ran wild in all the great forests; and no offence was looked upon as so venial, none so compatible with a noble Robin-Hood style of character, as this very trespass upon what were regarded as *ferœ naturæ*, and not at all as domestic property. But had it been otherwise, a trespass was not punishable with whipping; nor had Sir Thomas Lucy the power to irritate a whole community like Stratford-upon-Avon, by branding with permanent disgrace a young man so closely connected with three at least of the best families in the neighbourhood. Besides, had Shakspeare suffered any dishonour of that kind, the scandal would infallibly have pursued him at his very heels to London; and in that case Greene, who has left on record, in a posthumous work of 1592, his malicious feelings towards Shakspeare, could not have failed to notice it. For, be it remembered, that a judicial flagellation contains a twofold ignominy: flagellation is ignominious in its own nature, even though unjustly inflicted, and by a ruffian; secondly, any judicial punishment is ignominious, even though not wearing a shade of personal degradation. Now a judicial flagella-

tion includes both features of dishonour. And is it to be imagined that an enemy, searching with the diligence of malice for matter against Shakspeare, should have failed, six years after the event, to hear of that very memorable disgrace which had exiled him from Stratford, and was the very occasion of his first resorting to London; or that a leading company of players in the metropolis, *one of whom*, and a chief one, *was his own townsman*, should cheerfully adopt into their society, as an honoured partner, a young man yet flagrant from the lash of the executioner or the beadle?

This tale is fabulous, and rotten to its core; yet even this does less dishonour to Skakspeare's memory than the sequel attached to it. A sort of scurrilous rondeau, consisting of nine lines, so loathsome in its brutal stupidity and so vulgar in its expression that we shall not pollute our pages by transcribing it, has been imputed to Shakspeare ever since the days of the credulous Rowe. The total point of this idiot's drivel consists in calling Sir Thomas "an asse;" and well it justifies the poet's own remark,—"Let there be gall enough in thy ink, no matter though thou write with a goose pen." Our own belief is, that these lines were a production of Charles II.'s reign, and applied to a Sir Thomas Lucy, not very far removed, if at all, from the age of him who first picked up the precious filth: the phrase "parliament *member*," we believe to be quite unknown in the colloquial use of Queen Elizabeth's reign.

But, that we may rid ourselves once and for ever of this outrageous calumny upon Shakspeare's memory, we shall pursue the story to its final stage. Even Malone

has been thoughtless enough to accredit this closing chapter, which contains, in fact, such a superfetation of folly as the annals of human dulness do not exceed. Let us recapitulate the points of the story. A baronet, who has no deer and no park, is supposed to persecute a poet for stealing these aerial deer out of this aerial park, both lying in *nephelococcygia*. The poet sleeps upon this wrong for eighteen years; but at length, hearing that his persecutor is dead and buried, he conceives bloody thoughts of revenge. And this revenge he purposes to execute by picking a hole in his dead enemy's coat-of-arms. Is this coat-of-arms, then, Sir Thomas Lucy's? Why, no: Malone admits that it is not. For the poet, suddenly recollecting that this ridicule would settle upon the son of his enemy, selects another coat-of-arms, with which his dead enemy never had any connection, and he spends his thunder and lightning upon this irrelevant object; and, after all, the ridicule itself lies in a Welchman's mispronouncing one single heraldic term—a Welchman who mispronounces all words. The last act of the poet's malice recalls to us a sort of jest-book story of an Irishman, the vulgarity of which the reader will pardon in consideration of its relevancy. The Irishman having lost a pair of silk stockings, mentions to a friend that he has taken steps for recovering them by an advertisement, offering a reward to the finder. His friend objects that the costs of advertising, and the reward, would eat out the full value of the silk stockings. But to this the Irishman replies, with a knowing air, that he is not so green as to have overlooked *that;* and that, to keep down the reward, he had advertised the stockings as

worsted. Not at all less flagrant is the bull ascribed to Shakspeare, when he is made to punish a dead man by personalities meant for his exclusive ear, through his coat-of-arms, but at the same time, with the express purpose of blunting and defeating the edge of his own scurrility, is made to substitute for the real arms some others which had no more relation to the dead enemy than they had to the poet himself. This is the very sublime of folly, beyond which human dotage cannot advance.

It is painful, indeed, and dishonourable to human nature, that whenever men of vulgar habits and of poor education wish to impress us with a feeling of respect for a man's talents, they are sure to cite, by way of evidence, some gross instance of malignity. Power, in their minds, is best illustrated by malice or by the infliction of pain. To this unwelcome fact we have some evidence in the wretched tale which we have just dismissed; and there is another of the same description to be found in all Lives of Shakspeare, which we will expose to the contempt of the reader whilst we are in this field of discussion, that we may not afterwards have to resume so disgusting a subject.

This poet, who was a model of gracious benignity in his manners, and of whom, amidst our general ignorance, thus much is perfectly established, that the term *gentle* was almost as generally and by prescriptive right associated with his name as the affix of *venerable* with Bede, or *judicious* with Hooker, is alleged to have insulted a friend by an imaginary epitaph beginning "*Ten in the Hundred*," and supposing him to be damned, yet without

wit enough (which surely the Stratford bellman could have furnished) for devising any, even fanciful, reason for such a supposition; upon which the comment of some foolish critic is,—"The *sharpness of the satire* is said to have stung the man so much that he never forgave it." We have heard of the sting in the tail atoning for the brainless head; but in this doggerel the tail is surely as stingless as the head is brainless. For, 1*st*, *Ten in the Hundred* could be no reproach in Shakspeare's time, any more than to call a man *Three-and-a-half-per-cent.* in this present year 1838; except, indeed, amongst those foolish persons who built their morality upon the Jewish ceremonial law. Shakspeare himself took ten per cent. 2*dly*, It happens that John Combe, so far from being the object of the poet's scurrility, or viewing the poet as an object of implacable resentment, was a Stratford friend; that one of his family was affectionately remembered in Shakspeare's will by the bequest of his sword; and that John Combe himself recorded his perfect charity with Shakspeare by leaving him a legacy of L.5 sterling. And in this lies the key to the whole story. For, 3*dly*, the four lines were written and printed before Shakspeare was born. The name Combe is a common one; and some stupid fellow, who had seen the name in Shakspeare's will, and happened also to have seen the lines in a collection of epigrams, chose to connect the cases by attributing an identity to the two John Combes, though at war with chronology.

Finally, there is another specimen of doggerel attributed to Shakspeare, which is not equally unworthy of him, because not equally malignant, but otherwise equally

below his intellect, no less than his scholarship; we mean the inscription on his grave-stone. This, as a sort of *siste viator* appeal to future sextons, is worthy of the grave-digger or the parish-clerk, who was probably its author. Or it may have been an antique formula, like the vulgar record of ownership in books—

> Anthony Timothy Dolthead's book,
> God give him grace therein to look.

Thus far the matter is of little importance; and it might have been supposed that malignity itself could hardly have imputed such trash to Shakspeare. But when we find, even in this short compass, scarcely wider than the posy of a ring, room found for traducing the poet's memory, it becomes important to say, that the leading sentiment, the horror expressed at any disturbance offered to his bones, is not one to which Shakspeare could have attached the slightest weight; far less could have outraged the sanctities of place and subject, by affixing to any sentiment whatever (and, according to the fiction of the case, his farewell sentiment) the sanction of a curse.

Filial veneration and piety towards the memory of this great man have led us into a digression that might have been unseasonable in any cause less weighty than one having for its object to deliver his honoured name from a load of the most brutal malignity. Never more, we hope and venture to believe, will any thoughtless biographer impute to Shakspeare the asinine doggerel with which the uncritical blundering of his earliest biographer has caused his name to be dishonoured. We now resume the thread

of our biography. The stream of history is centuries in working itself clear of any calumny with which it has once been polluted.

Most readers will be aware of an old story, according to which Shakspeare gained his livelihood for some time after coming to London, by holding the horses of those who rode to the play. This legend is as idle as any one of those which we have just exposed. No custom ever existed of riding on horseback to the play. Gentlemen, who rode valuable horses, would assuredly not expose them systematically to the injury of standing exposed to cold for two or even four hours; and persons of inferior rank would not ride on horseback in the town. Besides, had such a custom ever existed, stables (or sheds at least) would soon have arisen to meet the public wants; and in some of the dramatic sketches of the day, which noticed every fashion as it arose, this would not have been overlooked. The story is traced originally to Sir William Davenant. Betterton the actor, who professed to have received it from him, passed it onwards to Rowe, he to Pope, Pope to Bishop Newton, the editor of Milton, and Newton to Dr Johnson. This pedigree of the fable, however, adds nothing to its credit, and multiplies the chances of some mistake. Another fable, not much less absurd, represents Shakspeare as having from the very first been borne upon the establishment of the theatre, and so far contradicts the other fable, but originally in the very humble character of *call-boy* or deputy prompter, whose business it was to summon each performer according to his order of coming upon the stage. This story, however, quite as much as the other, is irreconcileable

with the discovery recently made by Mr Collier, that in 1589 Shakspeare was a shareholder in the important property of a principal London theatre. It seems destined that all the undoubted facts of Shakspeare's life should come to us through the channel of legal documents, which are better evidence even than imperial medals; whilst, on the other hand, all the fabulous anecdotes, not having an attorney's seal to them, seem to have been the fictions of the wonder-maker. The plain presumption from the record of Shakspeare's situation in 1589, coupled with the fact that his first arrival in London was possibly not until 1587, but, according to the earliest account, not before 1586, a space of time which leaves but little room for any remarkable changes of situation, seems to be, that, either in requital of services done to the players by the poet's family, or in consideration of money advanced by his father-in-law, or on account of Shakspeare's personal accomplishments as an actor, and as an adapter of dramatic works to the stage; for one of these reasons, or for all of them united, William Shakspeare, about the twenty-third year of his age, was adopted into the partnership of a respectable histrionic company, possessing a first-rate theatre in the metropolis. If 1586 were the year in which he came up to London, it seems probable enough that his immediate motive to that step was the increasing distress of his father; for in that year John Shakspeare resigned the office of alderman. There is, however, a bare possibility that Shakspeare might have gone to London about the time when he completed his twenty-first year, that is, in the spring of 1585, but not earlier. Nearly two years after the birth of his eldest daughter Susanna,

his wife lay in for a second and a *last* time; but she then brought her husband twins, a son and a daughter. These children were baptized in February of the year 1585; so that Shakspeare's whole family of three children were born and baptized two months before he completed his majority. The twins were baptized by the names of Hamnet and Judith, those being the names of two amongst their sponsors, viz., Mr Sadler and his wife. Hamnet, which is a remarkable name in itself, becomes still more so from its resemblance to the immortal name of Hamlet* the Dane; it was, however, the real baptismal name of Mr Sadler, a friend of Shakspeare's, about fourteen years older than himself. Shakspeare's son must then have been most interesting to his heart, both as a twin-child and as his only boy. He died in 1596, when he was about eleven years old. Both daughters survived their father; both married; both left issue, and thus gave a chance for continuing the succession from the great poet. But all the four grandchildren died without offspring.

Of Shakspeare personally, at least of Shakspeare the man, as distinguished from the author, there remains little more to record. Already in 1592, Greene, in his posthumous "Groat's-worth of Wit," had expressed the earliest vocation of Shakspeare in the following sentence:

* And singular enough it is, as well as interesting, that Shakspeare had so entirely superseded to his own ear and memory the name Hamnet by the dramatic name of Hamlet, that in writing his will, he actually mis-spells the name of his friend Sadler, and calls him Hamlet. His son, however, who should have familiarized the true name to his ear, had then been dead for twenty years.

—"There is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers; in his own conceit the only *Shakscene* in a country!" This alludes to Shakspeare's office of re-casting, and even re-composing, dramatic works, so as to fit them for representation; and Master Greene, it is probable, had suffered in his self-estimation, or in his purse, by the alterations in some piece of his own which the duty of Shakspeare to the general interests of the theatre had obliged him to make.

In 1591 it has been supposed that Shakspeare wrote his first drama, the "Two Gentlemen of Verona;" the least characteristically marked of all his plays, and, with the exception of "Love's Labour's Lost," the least interesting. From this year, 1591 to that of 1611, are just twenty years, within which space lie the whole dramatic creations of Shakspeare, averaging nearly one for every six months. In 1611 was written the "Tempest," which is supposed to have been the last of all Shakspeare's works. Even on that account, as Mr Campbell feelingly observes, it has "a sort of sacredness;" and it is a most remarkable fact, and one calculated to make a man superstitious, that in this play the great enchanter Prospero, in whom, "*as if conscious*," says Mr Campbell, "*that this would be his last work*, the poet has been *inspired to typify himself as* a wise, potent, and *benevolent magician*," of whom, indeed, as of Shakspeare himself, it may be said, that "within that circle" (the circle of his own art) "none durst tread but he," solemnly and for ever renounces his mysterious functions, symbolically breaks his enchanter's wand, and declares that he will bury his books, his science, and his secrets

Deeper than did ever plummet sound.

Nay, it is even ominous, that in this play, and from the voice of Prospero, issues that magnificent prophecy of the total destruction which should one day swallow up

> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea all which it inherit.

And this prophecy is followed immediately by a most profound ejaculation, gathering into one pathetic abstraction the total philosophy of life :

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made of; and our little life
> Is rounded by a sleep;

that is, in effect, our life is a little tract of feverish vigils, surrounded and islanded by a shoreless ocean of sleep—sleep before birth, sleep after death.

These remarkable passages were probably not undesigned; but if we suppose them to have been thrown off without conscious notice of their tendencies, then, according to the superstition of the ancient Grecians, they would have been regarded as prefiguring words, prompted by the secret genius that accompanies every man, such as insure along with them their own accomplishment. With or without intention, however, it is believed that Shakspeare wrote nothing more after this exquisite romantic drama. With respect to the remainder of his personal history, Dr Drake and others have supposed, that during the twenty years from 1591 to 1611, he visited Stratford often, and latterly once a-year.

In 1589 he had possessed some share in a theatre; in 1596 he had a considerable share. Through Lord Southampton, as a surviving friend of Lord Essex, who was viewed

as the martyr to his Scottish politics, there can be no doubt that Shakspeare had acquired the favour of James I.; and accordingly, on the 29th of May 1603, about two months after the king's accession to the throne of England, a patent was granted to the company of players who possessed the Globe Theatre; in which patent Shakspeare's name stands second. This patent raised the company to the rank of his majesty's servants, whereas previously they are supposed to have been simply the servants of the Lord Chamberlain. Perhaps it was in grateful acknowledgment of this royal favour that Shakspeare afterwards, in 1606, paid that sublime compliment to the house of Stuart which is involved in the vision shown to Macbeth. This vision is managed with exquisite skill: it was impossible to display the whole series of princes from Macbeth to James I.; but he beholds the posterity of Banquo, one "gold-bound brow" succeeding to another, until he comes to an eighth apparition of a Scottish king,

> Who bears a glass
> Which shows him many more; and some he sees
> Who *twofold* balls and *treble* sceptres carry;

thus bringing down without tedium the long succession to the very person of James I. by the symbolic image of the two crowns united on one head.

About the beginning of the century Shakspeare had become rich enough to purchase the best house in Stratford, called *The Great House*, which name he altered to *New Place;* and in 1602 he bought 107 acres adjacent to this house for a sum (L.320) corresponding to about 1500 guineas of modern money. Malone thinks that he purchased the house as early as 1597; and it is certain that

about that time he was able to assist his father in obtaining a renewed grant of arms from the Heralds' College, and therefore, of course, to re-establish his father's fortunes. Ten years of well-directed industry, viz., from 1591 to 1601, and the prosperity of the theatre in which he was a proprietor, had raised him to affluence; and after another ten years, improved with the same success, he was able to retire with an income of L.300, or (according to the customary computations) in modern money of L.1500, per annum. Shakspeare was in fact the first man of letters, Pope the second, and Sir Walter Scott the third, who, in Great Britain, has ever realized a large fortune by literature; or in Christendom, if we except Voltaire, and two dubious cases in Italy. The four or five latter years of his life Shakspeare passed in dignified ease, in profound meditation, we may be sure, and in universal respect, at his native town of Stratford; and there he died, on the 23d of April 1616.*

His daughter Susanna had been married on the 5th of June of the year 1607, to Dr John Hall,† a physician in

* "I have heard that Mr Shakspeare was a natural wit, without any art at all. Hee frequented the plays all his younger time, but in his elder days lived at Stratford, and supplied the stage with two plays every year; and for itt had an allowance so large, that he spent at the rate of 1,000*l.* a-year, as I have heard. Shakespeare, Drayton, and Ben Jonson, had a merie meeting, and it seems drank too hard, for Shakespear died of a feavour there contracted." (Diary of the Rev. John Ward, A.M., Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, extending from 1648 to 1679, p. 183. Lond. 1839, 8vo.)

† It is naturally to be supposed that Dr Hall would attend the sick-bed of his father-in-law; and the discovery of this gentleman's medical diary promised some gratification to our curiosity,

Stratford. The doctor died in November 1635, aged sixty; his wife, at the age of sixty-six, on July 11, 1640. They had one child, a daughter, named Elizabeth, born in 1608, married April 22, 1626, to Thomas Nashe, Esq., left a widow in 1647, and subsequently re-married to Sir John Barnard; but this Lady Barnard, the sole granddaughter of the poet, had no children by either marriage. The other daughter Judith, on February 10, 1616 (about ten weeks before her father's death) married Mr Thomas Quiney of Stratford, by whom she had three sons, Shakspeare, Richard, and Thomas. Judith was about thirty-one years old at the time of her marriage; and living just forty-six years afterwards, she died in February 1662, at the age of seventy-seven. Her three sons died without issue; and thus, in the direct lineal descent, it is certain that no representative has survived of this transcendent poet, the most august amongst created intellects.

After this review of Shakspeare's life, it becomes our duty to take a summary survey of his works, of his intellectual powers, and of his station in literature,—a station which is now irrevocably settled, not so much (which happens in other cases) by a vast overbalance of favourable suffrages, as by acclamation; not so much by the *voices* of those who admire him up to the verge of idolatry, as by the *acts* of those who everywhere seek for his works among the primal necessities of life, demand them, and crave them as they do their daily bread; not so much by eulogy openly proclaiming itself, as by the silent homage

as to the cause of Shakspeare's death. Unfortunately, it does not commence until the year 1617.

recorded in the endless multiplication of what he has bequeathed us; not so much by his own compatriots, who, with regard to almost every other author,* compose the total amount of his *effective* audience, as by the unanimous "All hail!" of intellectual Christendom; finally, not by the hasty partisanship of his own generation, nor by the biassed judgment of an age trained in the same modes of feeling and of thinking with himself, but by the solemn award of generation succeeding to generation, of one age correcting the obliquities or peculiarities of another; by the verdict of two hundred and thirty years, which have now elapsed since the very *latest* of his creations, or of two hundred and forty-seven years if we date from the earliest; a verdict which has been continually revived and re-opened, probed, searched, vexed, by criticism in every spirit, from the most genial and intelligent, down to the most malignant and scurrilously hostile which feeble heads and great ignorance could suggest when co-operating with impure hearts and narrow sensibilities; a verdict, in short, sustained and countersigned by a longer series of writers, many of them eminent for wit or learning, than were ever before congregated upon any inquest

* An exception ought perhaps to be made for Sir Walter Scott and for Cervantes; but with regard to all other writers, Dante, suppose, or Ariosto amongst Italians, Camoens amongst those of Portugal, Schiller amongst Germans, however ably they may have been naturalised in foreign languages, as all of those here mentioned (excepting only Ariosto) have in one part of their works been most powerfully naturalised in English, it still remains true (and the very sale of the books is proof sufficient) that an alien author never does take root in the general sympathies out of his own country; he takes his station in libraries, he is read by the

relating to any author, be he who he might, ancient* or modern, Pagan or Christian. It was a most witty saying with respect to a piratical and knavish publisher, who made a trade of insulting the memories of deceased authors by forged writings, that he was "among the new terrors of death." But in the gravest sense it may be affirmed of Shakspeare, that he is among the modern luxuries of life; that life, in fact, is a new thing, and one more to be coveted, since Shakspeare has extended the domains of human consciousness, and pushed its dark frontiers into regions not so much as dimly descried or even suspected before his time, far less illuminated (as now they are) by beauty and tropical luxuriance of life. For instance,—a single instance, indeed one which in itself is a world of new revelation,—the possible beauty of the female character had not been seen as in a dream before Shakspeare called into perfect life the radiant shapes of Desdemona, of Imogene, of Hermione, of Perdita, of Ophelia, of Miranda, and many others. The Una of Spenser, earlier by ten or fifteen years than most of these, was an idealised portrait of female innocence and virgin purity, but too shadowy and unreal for a dramatic reality. And as to the Grecian classics, let not the reader imagine for an instant that any prototype in this field of Shakspearian power can be looked for there. The *Antigone* and the *Electra* of the tragic poets are the two leading female

man of learned leisure, he is known and valued by the refined and the elegant, but he is not (what Shakspeare is for Germany and America) in any proper sense a *popular* favourite.

* It will occur to many readers, that perhaps Homer may furnish the sole exception to this sweeping assertion. See Note, p. 98

characters that classical antiquity offers to our respect, but assuredly not to our impassioned love, as disciplined and exalted in the school of Shakspeare. They challenge our admiration, severe, and even stern, as impersonations of filial duty, cleaving to the steps of a desolate and afflicted old man; or of sisterly affection, maintaining the rights of a brother under circumstances of peril, of desertion, and consequently of perfect self-reliance. Iphigenia, again, though not dramatically coming before us in her own person, but according to the beautiful report of a spectator, presents us with a fine statuesque model of heroic fortitude, and of one whose young heart, even in the very agonies of her cruel immolation, refused to forget, by a single indecorous gesture, or so much as a moment's neglect of her own princely descent, that she herself was "a lady in the land." These are fine marble groups, but they are not the warm breathing realities of Shakspeare; there is "no speculation" in their cold marble eyes; the breath of life is not in their nostrils; the fine pulses of womanly sensibilities are not throbbing in their bosoms. And besides this immeasurable difference between the cold moony reflexes of life, as exhibited by the power of Grecian art, and the true sunny life of Shakspeare, it must be observed that the Antigones, &c., of the antique put forward but one single trait of character, like the aloe with its single blossom: this solitary feature is presented to us as an abstraction, and as an insulated quality; whereas in Shakspeare all is presented in the *concrete;* that is to say, not brought forward in relief, as by some effort of an anatomical artist; but embodied and imbedded, so to speak, as by the force of a creative nature,

in the complex system of a human life; a life in which all the elements move and play simultaneously, and with something more than mere simultaneity or co-existence, acting and re-acting each upon the other—nay, even acting by each other and through each other. In Shakspeare's characters is felt for ever a real *organic* life, where each is for the whole and in the whole, and where the whole is for each and in each. They only are real incarnations.

The Greek poets could not exhibit any approximations to *female* character, without violating the truth of Grecian life, and shocking the feelings of the audience. The drama with the Greeks, as with us, though much less than with us, was a picture of human life; and that which could not occur in life could not wisely be exhibited on the stage. Now, in ancient Greece, women were secluded from the society of men. The conventual sequestration of the γυναικωνίτις, or female apartment* of the house, and the Mahommedan consecration of its threshold against the ingress of males, had been transplanted from Asia into Greece thousands of years perhaps before either convents or Mahommed existed. Thus barred from all open social intercourse, women could not develop or express any character by word or action. Even to *have* a character, violated, to a Grecian mind, the ideal portrait of feminine excellence; whence, perhaps, partly the too

* Apartment is here used, as the reader will observe, in its true and continental acceptation, as a division or *compartment* of a house including many rooms; a suite of chambers, but a suite which is partitioned off (as in palaces), not a single chamber; a sense so commonly and so erroneously given to this word in England.

generic, too little individualized, style of Grecian beauty. But prominently to *express* a character was impossible under the common tenor of Grecian life, unless when high tragical catastrophes transcended the decorums of that tenor, or for a brief interval raised the curtain which veiled it. Hence the subordinate part which women play upon the Greek stage in all but some half dozen cases. In the paramount tragedy on that stage, the model tragedy, the *Œdipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles, there is virtually no woman at all; for Jocasta is a party to the story merely as the dead Laius or the self-murdered Sphinx was a party,—viz., by her contributions to the fatalities of the event, not by anything she does or says spontaneously. In fact, the Greek poet, if a wise poet, could not address himself genially to a task in which he must begin by shocking the sensibilities of his countrymen. And hence followed, not only the dearth of female characters in the Grecian drama, but also a second result still more favourable to the sense of a new power evolved by Shakspeare. Whenever the common law of Grecian life did give way, it was, as we have observed, to the suspending force of some great convulsion or tragical catastrophe. This for a moment (like an earthquake in a nunnery) would set at liberty even the timid, fluttering Grecian women, those doves of the dove-cot, and would call some of them into action. But which? Precisely those of energetic and masculine minds; the timid and feminine would but shrink the more from public gaze and from tumult. Thus it happened, that such female characters as *were* exhibited in Greece, could not but be the harsh and the severe. If a gentle Ismene appeared for a moment in

contest with some energetic sister Antigone (and chiefly, perhaps, by way of drawing out the fiercer character of that sister), she was soon dismissed as unfit for scenical effect. So that not only were female characters few, but, moreover, of these few the majority were but repetitions of masculine qualities in female persons. Female agency being seldom summoned on the stage except when it had received a sort of special dispensation from its sexual character, by some terrific convulsions of the house or the city, naturally it assumed the style of action suited to these circumstances. And hence it arose, that not woman as she differed from man, but woman as she resembled man—woman, in short, seen under circumstances so dreadful as to abolish the effect of sexual distinction, was the woman of the Greek tragedy.* And hence generally arose for Shakspeare the wider field, and the more astonishing by its perfect novelty, when he first introduced female characters, not as mere varieties or echoes of masculine characters, a Medea or Clytemnestra, or a vindictive Hecuba, the mere tigress of the tragic tiger, but female characters that had the appropriate beauty of female nature; woman no longer grand, terrific, and repulsive, but woman "after her kind"—the other hemisphere of the dramatic world; woman running through the vast gamut of womanly loveliness; woman as emancipated,

* And hence, by parity of reason, under the opposite circumstances, under the circumstances which, instead of abolishing, most emphatically drew forth the sexual distinctions, viz., in the *comic* aspects of social intercourse, the reason that we see no women on the Greek stage; the Greek comedy, unless when it affects the extravagant fun of farce, rejects women.

exalted, ennobled, under a new law of Christian morality; woman the sister and co-equal of man, no longer his slave, his prisoner, and sometimes his rebel. "It is a far cry to Loch Awe;" and from the Athenian stage to the stage of Shakspeare, it may be said, is a prodigious interval. True; but prodigious as it is, there is really nothing between them. The Roman stage, at least the tragic stage, as is well known, was put out, as by an extinguisher, by the cruel amphitheatre, just as a candle is made pale and ridiculous by daylight. Those who were fresh from the real murders of the bloody amphitheatre regarded with contempt the mimic murders of the stage. Stimulation too coarse and too intense had its usual effect in making the sensibilities callous. Christian emperors arose at length, who abolished the amphitheatre in its bloodier features. But by that time the genius of the tragic muse had long slept the sleep of death. And that muse had no resurrection until the age of Shakspeare. So that, notwithstanding a gulf of nineteen centuries and upwards separates Shakspeare from Euripides, the last of the surviving Greek tragedians, the one is still the nearest successor of the other, just as Connaught and the islands in Clew Bay are next neighbours to America, although three thousand watery columns, each of a cubic mile in dimensions, divide them from each other.

A second reason, which lends an emphasis of novelty and effective power to Shakspeare's female world, is a peculiar fact of contrast which exists between that and his corresponding world of men. Let us explain. The purpose and the intention of the Grecian stage was not primarily to develop human *character*, whether in men

or in women; human *fates* were its object; great tragic situations under the mighty control of a vast cloudy destiny, dimly descried at intervals, and brooding over human life by mysterious agencies, and for mysterious ends. Man, no longer the representative of an august *will*,—man, the passion-puppet of fate, could not with any effect display what we call a character, which is a distinction between man and man, emanating originally from the will, and expressing its determinations, moving under the large variety of human impulses. The will is the central pivot of character; and this was obliterated, thwarted, cancelled, by the dark fatalism which brooded over the Grecian stage. That explanation will sufficiently clear up the reason why marked or complex variety of character was slighted by the great principles of the Greek tragedy. And every scholar who has studied that grand drama of Greece with feeling,—that drama, so magnificent, so regal, so stately,—and who has thoughtfully investigated its principles, and its difference from the English drama, will acknowledge that powerful and elaborate character,—character, for instance, that could employ the fiftieth part of that profound analysis which has been applied to Hamlet, to Falstaff, to Lear, to Othello, and applied by Mrs Jamieson so admirably to the full development of the Shakspearian heroines, would have been as much wasted, nay, would have been defeated, and interrupted the blind agencies of fate, just in the same way as it would injure the shadowy grandeur of a ghost to individualize it too much. Milton's angels are slightly touched, superficially touched, with differences of character; but they are such differences, so simple and general,

as are just sufficient to rescue them from the reproach applied to Virgil's "*fortemque Gyan, fortemque Cloanthem;*" just sufficient to make them knowable apart. Pliny speaks of painters who painted in one or two colours; and, as respects the angelic characters, Milton does so; he is *monochromatic.* So, and for reasons resting upon the same ultimate philosophy, were the mighty architects of the Greek tragedy. They also were monochromatic; they also, as to the characters of their persons, painted in one colour. And so far there might have been the same novelty in Shakspeare's men as in his women. There *might* have been; but the reason why there is *not*, must be sought in the fact, that History, the muse of History, had there even been no such muse as Melpomene, would have forced us into an acquaintance with human character. History, as the representative of actual life, of real man, gives us powerful delineations of character in its chief agents, that is, in men; and therefore it is that Shakspeare, the absolute creator of female character, was but the mightiest of all painters with regard to male character. Take a single instance. The Antony of Shakspeare, immortal for its execution, is found, after all, as regards the primary conception, in history: Shakspeare's delineation is but the expansion of the germ already pre-existing, by way of scattered fragments, in Cicero's Philippics, in Cicero's Letters, in Appian, &c. But Cleopatra, equally fine, is a pure creation of art: the situation and the scenic circumstances belong to history, but the character belongs to Shakspeare.

In the great world therefore of woman, as the interpreter of the shifting phases and the lunar varieties of

that mighty changeable planet, that lovely satellite of man, Shakspeare stands not the first only, not the original only, but is yet the sole authentic oracle of truth. Woman, therefore, the beauty of the female mind, *this* is one great field of his power. The supernatural world, the world of apparitions, *that* is another: for reasons which it would be easy to give, reasons emanating from the gross mythology of the ancients, no Grecian,* no Roman, could have conceived a ghost. That shadowy conception, the protesting apparition, the awful projection of the human conscience, belongs to the Christian mind: and in all Christendom, who, let us ask, who, but Shakspeare, has found the power for effectually working this mysterious mode of being? In summoning back to earth "the majesty of buried Denmark," how like an awful necromancer does Shakspeare appear! All the pomps and grandeurs which religion, which the grave, which the popular superstition had gathered about the subject of apparitions, are here converted to his purpose, and bend to one awful effect. The wormy grave brought

* It may be thought, however, by some readers, that Æschylus, in his fine phantom of Darius, has approached the English ghost. As a foreign ghost, we would wish (and we are sure that our excellent readers would wish) to show every courtesy and attention to this apparition of Darius. It has the advantage of being royal, an advantage which it shares with the ghost of the royal Dane. Yet how different, how removed by a total world, from that or any of Shakspeare's ghosts! Take that of Banquo, for instance: how shadowy, how unreal, yet how real! Darius is a mere state ghost —a diplomatic ghost. But Banquo—he exists only for Macbeth: the guests do not see him, yet how solemn, how real, how heart-searching he is!

into antagonism with the scenting of the early dawn; the trumpet of resurrection suggested, and again as an antagonist idea to the crowing of the cock (a bird ennobled in the Christian mythus by the part he is made to play at the Crucifixion); its starting "as a guilty thing" placed in opposition to its majestic expression of offended dignity when struck at by the partisans of the sentinels; its awful allusions to the secrets of its prison-house; its ubiquity, contrasted with its local presence; its aerial substance, yet clothed in palpable armour; the heart-shaking solemnity of its language, and the appropriate scenery of its haunt, viz., the ramparts of a capital fortress, with no witnesses but a few gentlemen mounting guard at the dead of night,—what a mist, what a *mirage* of vapour, is here accumulated, through which the dreadful being in the centre looms upon us in far larger proportions than could have happened had it been insulated and left naked of this circumstantial pomp! In the *Tempest*, again, what new modes of life, preternatural, yet far as the poles from the spiritualities of religion. Ariel in antithesis to Caliban!* What is most ethereal to what is most animal! A phantom of air, an abstraction of the dawn and of vesper sun-lights, a bodiless sylph on the one hand; on the other a gross carnal monster, like the Miltonic Asmodai, "the fleshliest incubus" among the fiends, and yet so far ennobled into interest by his intellectual power, and by the grandeur of misanthropy!

* Caliban has not yet been thoroughly fathomed. For all Shakspeare's great creations are like works of nature, subjects of unexhaustible study.—See Note, p. 99.

In the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, again, we have the old traditional fairy, a lovely mode of preternatural life, remodified by Shakspeare's eternal talisman. Oberon and Titania remind us at first glance of Ariel; they approach, but how far they recede: they are like—"like, but oh, how different!" And in no other exhibition of this dreamy population of the moonlight forests and forest-lawns are the circumstantial proprieties of fairy life so exquisitely imagined, sustained, or expressed. The dialogue between Oberon and Titania is, of itself, and taken separately from its connection, one of the most delightful poetic scenes that literature affords. The witches in Macbeth are another variety of supernatural life, in which Shakspeare's power to enchant and to disenchant are alike portentous. The circumstances of the blasted heath, the army at a distance, the withered attire of the mysterious hags, and the choral litanies of their fiendish Sabbath, are as finely imagined in their kind as those which herald and which surround the ghost in Hamlet. There we see the *positive* of Shakspeare's superior power. But now turn and look to the *negative*. At a time when the trials of witches, the royal book on demonology, and popular superstition (all so far useful, as they prepared a basis of undoubting faith for the poet's serious use of such agencies) had degraded and polluted the ideas of these mysterious beings by many mean associations, Shakspeare does not fear to employ them in high tragedy (a tragedy moreover which, though not the very greatest of his efforts as an intellectual whole, nor as a struggle of passion, is *among* the greatest in any view, and positively *the* greatest for scenical grandeur, and in

that respect makes the nearest approach of all English tragedies to the Grecian model); he does not fear to introduce, for the same appalling effect as that for which Æschylus introduced the Eumenides, a triad of old women, concerning whom an English wit has remarked this grotesque peculiarity in the popular creed of that day,—that although potent over winds and storms, in league with powers of darkness, they yet stood in awe of the constable,—yet relying on his own supreme power to disenchant as well as to enchant, to create and to uncreate, he mixes these women and their dark machineries with the power of armies, with the agencies of kings, and the fortunes of martial kingdoms. Such was the sovereignty of this poet, so mighty its compass!

A third fund of Shakspeare's peculiar power lies in his teeming fertility of fine thoughts and sentiments. From his works alone might be gathered a golden bead-roll of thoughts the deepest, subtlest, most pathetic, and yet most catholic and universally intelligible; the most characteristic, also, and appropriate to the particular person, the situation, and the case, yet, at the same time, applicable to the circumstances of every human being, under all the accidents of life, and all vicissitudes of fortune. But this subject offers so vast a field of observation, it being so eminently the prerogative of Shakspeare to have thought more finely and more extensively than all other poets combined, that we cannot wrong the dignity of such a theme by doing more, in our narrow limits, than simply noticing it as one of the emblazonries upon Shakspeare's shield.

Fourthly, we shall indicate (and, as in the last case,

barely indicate, without attempting in so vast a field to offer any inadequate illustrations) one mode of Shakspeare's dramatic excellence which hitherto has not attracted any special or separate notice. We allude to the forms of life, and natural human passion, as apparent in the structure of his dialogue. Among the many defects and infirmities of the French and of the Italian drama, indeed we may say of the Greek, the dialogue proceeds always by independent speeches, replying indeed to each other, but never modified in its several openings by the momentary effect of its several terminal forms immediately preceding. Now, in Shakspeare, who first set an example of that most important innovation, in all his impassioned dialogues, each reply or rejoinder seems the mere rebound of the previous speech. Every form of natural interruption, breaking through the restraints of ceremony under the impulses of tempestuous passion; every form of hasty interrogative, ardent reiteration when a question has been evaded; every form of scornful repetition of the hostile words; every impatient continuation of the hostile statement; in short, all modes and formulæ by which anger, hurry, fretfulness, scorn, impatience, or excitement under any movement whatever, can disturb or modify or dislocate the formal bookish style of commencement,—these are as rife in Shakspeare's dialogue as in life itself; and how much vivacity, how profound a verisimilitude, they add to the scenic effect as an imitation of human passion and real life, we need not say. A volume might be written illustrating the vast varieties of Shakspeare's art and power in this one field of improvement; another volume might be dedicated to the exposure of the

lifeless and unnatural result from the opposite practice in the foreign stages of France and Italy. And we may truly say, that were Shakspeare distinguished from them by this single feature of nature and propriety, he would on that account alone have merited a great immortality.

ON THE KNOCKING AT THE GATE

IN MACBETH.

From my boyish days I had always felt a great perplexity on one point in Macbeth. It was this: the knocking at the gate, which succeeds to the murder of Duncan, produced to my feelings an effect for which I never could account. The effect was, that it reflected back upon the murderer a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity; yet, however obstinately I endeavoured with my understanding to comprehend this, for many years I never could see *why* it should produce such an effect.

Here I pause for one moment, to exhort the reader never to pay any attention to his understanding, when it stands in opposition to any other faculty of his mind. The mere understanding, however useful and indispensable, is the meanest faculty in the human mind, and the most to be distrusted; and yet the great majority of people trust to nothing else, which may do for ordinary life, but not for philosophical purposes. Of this out of ten thousand instances that I might produce, I will cite one. Ask of any person whatsoever, who is not previously prepared for the demand by a knowledge of the perspective, to draw in the rudest way the commonest appearance which depends

upon the laws of that science; as, for instance, to represent the effect of two walls standing at right angles to each other, or the appearance of the houses on each side of a street, as seen by a person looking down the street from one extremity. Now in all cases, unless the person has happened to observe in pictures how it is that artists produce these effects, he will be utterly unable to make the smallest approximation to it. Yet why? For he has actually seen the effect every day of his life. The reason is—that he allows his understanding to overrule his eyes. His understanding, which includes no intuitive knowledge of the laws of vision, can furnish him with no reason why a line which is known and can be proved to be a horizontal line, should not *appear* a horizontal line; a line that made any angle with the perpendicular, less than a right angle, would seem to him to indicate that his houses were all tumbling down together. Accordingly, he makes the line of his houses a horizontal line, and fails, of course, to produce the effect demanded. Here, then, is one instance out of many, in which not only the understanding is allowed to overrule the eyes, but where the understanding is positively allowed to obliterate the eyes, as it were; for not only does the man believe the evidence of his understanding in opposition to that of his eyes, but (what is monstrous!) the idiot is not aware that his eyes ever gave such evidence. He does not know that he has seen (and therefore *quoad* his consciousness has *not* seen) that which he *has* seen every day of his life.

But to return from this digression, my understanding could furnish no reason why the knocking at the gate in Macbeth should produce any effect, direct or reflected. In fact, my understanding said positively that it could *not* produce any effect. But I knew better; I felt that it

did; and I waited and clung to the problem until further knowledge should enable me to solve it. At length, in 1812, Mr. Williams made his *début* on the stage of Ratcliffe Highway, and executed those unparalleled murders which have procured for him such a brilliant and undying reputation. On which murders, by the way, I must observe, that in one respect they have had an ill effect, by making the connoisseur in murder very fastidious in his taste, and dissatisfied by anything that has been since done in that line. All other murders look pale by the deep crimson of his; and, as an amateur once said to me in a querulous tone, "There has been absolutely nothing *doing* since his time, or nothing that's worth speaking of." But this is wrong; for it is unreasonable to expect all men to be great artists, and born with the genius of Mr. Williams. Now it will be remembered, that in the first of these murders (that of the Marrs), the same incident (of a knocking at the door, soon after the work of extermination was complete) did actually occur, which the genius of Shakspere has invented; and all good judges, and the most eminent dilettanti, acknowledged the felicity of Shakspere's suggestion, as soon as it was actually realized. Here, then, was a fresh proof that I was right in relying on my own feeling, in opposition to my understanding; and I again set myself to study the problem; at length I solved it to my own satisfaction, and my solution is this. Murder, in ordinary cases, where the sympathy is wholly directed to the case of the murdered person, is an incident of coarse and vulgar horror; and for this reason, that it flings the interest exclusively upon the natural but ignoble instinct by which we cleave to life; an instinct which, as being indispensable to the primal law of self-preservation, is the same in kind (though different in degree) amongst all

living creatures : this instinct, therefore, because it annihilates all distinctions, and degrades the greatest of men to the level of " the poor beetle that we tread on," exhibits human nature in its most abject and humiliating attitude. Such an attitude would little suit the purposes of the poet. What then must he do ? He must throw the interest on the murderer. Our sympathy must be with *him* (of course I mean a sympathy of comprehension, a sympathy by which we enter into his feelings, and are made to understand them,—not a sympathy of pity or approbation*). In the murdered person, all strife of thought, all flux and reflux of passion and of purpose, are crushed by one overwhelming panic ; the fear of instant death smites him " with its petrific mace." But in the murderer, such a murderer as a poet will condescend to, there must be raging some great storm of passion—jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred—which will create a hell within him ; and into this hell we are to look.

In Macbeth, for the sake of gratifying his own enormous and teeming faculty of creation, Shakspere has introduced two murderers : and, as usual in his hands, they are remarkably discriminated : but, though in Macbeth the strife of mind is greater than in his wife, the tiger spirit not so awake, and his feelings caught chiefly by contagion from her,—yet, as both were finally involved in the guilt of

* It seems almost ludicrous to guard and explain my use of a word, in a situation where it would naturally explain itself. But it has become necessary to do so, in consequence of the unscholarlike use of the word sympathy, at present so general, by which, instead of taking it in its proper sense, as the act of reproducing in our minds the feelings of another, whether for hatred, indignation, love, pity, or approbation, it is made a mere synonyme of the word *pity;* and hence, instead of saying " sympathy *with* another," many writers adopt the monstrous barbarism of " sympathy *for* another."

murder, the murderous mind of necessity is finally to be presumed in both. This was to be expressed; and on its own account, as well as to make it a more proportionable antagonist to the unoffending nature of their victim, "the gracious Duncan," and adequately to expound "the deep damnation of his taking off," this was to be expressed with peculiar energy. We were to be made to feel that the human nature, *i.e.*, the divine nature of love and mercy, spread through the hearts of all creatures, and seldom utterly withdrawn from man—was gone, vanished, extinct; and that the fiendish nature had taken its place. And, as this effect is marvellously accomplished in the *dialogues* and *soliloquies* themselves, so it is finally consummated by the expedient under consideration; and it is to this that I now solicit the reader's attention. If the reader has ever witnessed a wife, daughter, or sister in a fainting fit, he may chance to have observed that the most affecting moment in such a spectacle is *that* in which a sigh and a stirring announce the recommencement of suspended life. Or, if the reader has ever been present in a vast metropolis, on the day when some great national idol was carried in funeral pomp to his grave, and chancing to walk near the course through which it passed, has felt powerfully in the silence and desertion of the streets, and in the stagnation of ordinary business, the deep interest which at that moment was possessing the heart of man—if all at once he should hear the death-like stillness broken up by the sound of wheels rattling away from the scene, and making known that the transitory vision was dissolved, he will be aware that at no moment was his sense of the complete suspension and pause in ordinary human concerns so full and affecting, as at that moment when the suspension ceases, and the goings-on of human life are suddenly resumed. All action

in any direction is best expounded, measured, and made apprehensible, by reaction. Now apply this to the case in Macbeth. Here, as I have said, the retiring of the human heart, and the entrance of the fiendish heart was to be expressed and made sensible. Another world has stept in; and the murderers are taken out of the region of human things, human purposes, human desires. They are transfigured: Lady Macbeth is "unsexed;" Macbeth has forgot that he was born of woman; both are conformed to the image of devils; and the world of devils is suddenly revealed. But how shall this be conveyed and made palpable? In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear. The murderers, and the murder must be insulated—cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs—locked up and sequestered in some deep recess; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested—laid asleep—tranced—racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated; relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is, that when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live, first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them.

O mighty poet! Thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art; but are also like the phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the

stars and the flowers; like frost and snow, rain and dew, hail-storm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert—but that, the farther we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident!

NOTES TO SHAKSPEARE.

The Name Shakspeare.—Page 1.

Mr Campbell, the latest editor of Shakspeare's dramatic works, observes that the "poet's name has been variously written Shaxpeare, Shackspeare, Shakspeare, and Shakspere;" to which varieties might be added Shagspere, from the Worcester Marriage License, published in 1836. But the fact is, that by combining with all the differences in spelling the first syllable, all those in spelling the second, more than twenty-five distinct varieties of the name may be expanded (like an algebraic series), for the choice of the curious in mis-spelling. Above all things, those varieties which arise from the intercalation of the middle *e* (that is, the *e* immediately before the final syllable *spear*), can never be overlooked by those who remember, at the opening of the Dunciad, the note upon this very question about the orthography of Shakspeare's name, as also upon the other great question about the title of the immortal Satire. Whether it ought not to have been the Dunceiade, seeing that Dunce, its great author and progenitor, cannot possibly dispense with the letter *e*. Meantime we must remark, that the first

three of Mr Campbell's variations are mere caprices of the press; as is Shagspere; or, more probably, this last euphonious variety arose out of the gross clownish pronunciation of the two hiccuping "*marksmen*" who rode over to Worcester for the license: and one cannot forbear laughing at the bishop's secretary for having been so misled by two varlets, professedly incapable of signing their own names. The same drunken villains had cut down the bride's name *Hathaway* into *Hathwey*. Finally, to treat the matter with seriousness, Sir Frederick Madden has shown, in his recent letter to the Society of Antiquaries, that the poet himself in all probability wrote the name uniformly *Shakspere*. Orthography, both of proper names, of appellatives, and of words universally, was very unsettled up to a period long subsequent to that of Shakspeare. Still it must usually have happened, that names written variously and laxly by others would be written uniformly by the owners; especially by those owners who had occasion to sign their names frequently, and by literary people, whose attention was often, as well as consciously, directed to the proprieties of spelling. *Shakspeare* is now too familiar to the eye for any alteration to be attempted; but it is pretty certain that Sir Frederick Madden is right in stating the poet's own signature to have been uniformly *Shakspere*. It is so written twice in the course of his will, and it is so written on a blank leaf of Florio's English translation of Montaigne's Essays; a book recently discovered, and sold, on account of its autograph, for a hundred guineas.

Shakspeare's Reputation.—Page 19.

The necessity of compression obliges us to omit many arguments and references by which we could demonstrate the fact, that Shakspeare's reputation was always in a progressive state; allowing only for the interruption of about seventeen years, which this poet, in common with all others, sustained, not so much from the state of war (which did not fully occupy four of those years), as from the triumph of a gloomy fanaticism. Deduct the twenty-three years

of the seventeenth century which had elapsed before the first folio appeared, to this space add seventeen years of fanatical madness, during fourteen of which *all* dramatic entertainments were suppressed, the remainder is sixty years. And surely the sale of four editions of a vast folio in that space of time was an expression of an abiding interest. *No other poet, except Spenser, continued to sell throughout the century.* Besides, in arguing the case of a *dramatic* poet, we must bear in mind, that although readers of learned books might be diffused over the face of the land, the readers of poetry would be chiefly concentrated in the metropolis, and such persons would have no need to buy what they heard at the theatres. But then comes the question, whether Shakspeare kept possession of the theatres. And we are really humiliated by the gross want of sense which has been shown, by Malone chiefly, but also by many others, in discussing this question. From the restoration to 1682, says Malone, no more than four plays of Shakspeare's were performed by a principal company in London. "Such was the lamentable taste of those times, that the plays of Fletcher, Jonson, and Shirley, were much oftener exhibited than those of our author." What cant is this! If that taste were "lamentable," what are we to think of our own times, when plays a thousand times below those of Fletcher, or even of Shirley, continually displace Shakspeare? Shakspeare would himself have exulted in finding that he gave way only to dramatists so excellent. And, as we have before observed, both then and now, it is the very familiarity with Shakspeare which often banishes him from audiences honestly in quest of relaxation and amusement. Novelty is the very soul of such relaxation; but in our closets, when we are *not* unbending, when our minds are in a state of tension from intellectual cravings, then it is that we resort to Shakspeare; and oftentimes those who honour him most, like ourselves, are the most impatient of seeing his divine scenes disfigured by unequal representation (good, perhaps, in a single personation, bad in all the rest); or to hear his divine thoughts mangled in the recitation; or (which is worst of all) to hear them dishonoured and defeated by im-

perfect apprehension in the audience, or by defective sympathy. Meantime, if one theatre played only four of Shakspeare's dramas, another played at least seven. But the grossest folly of Malone is, in fancying the numerous alterations so many insults to Shakspeare, whereas they expressed as much homage to his memory as if the unaltered dramas had been retained. The substance *was* retained. The changes were merely concessions to the changing views of scenical propriety; sometimes, no doubt, made with a simple view to the revolution effected by Davenant at the restoration, in bringing *scenes* (in the painter's sense) upon the stage; sometimes also with a view to the altered fashions of the audience during the suspensions of the action, or perhaps to the introduction of *after-pieces*, by which, of course, the time was abridged for the main performance. A volume might be written upon this subject. Meantime let us never be told, that a poet was losing, or had lost his ground, who found in his lowest depression, amongst his almost idolatrous supporters, a great king distracted by civil wars, a mighty republican poet distracted by puritanical fanaticism, the greatest successor by far of that great poet, a papist and a bigoted royalist, and finally, the leading actor of the century, who gave and reflected the ruling impulses of his age.

Value of Asbies.—Page 32.

After all the assistance given to such equations between different times or different places by Sir George Shuckborough's tables, and other similar investigations, it is still a very difficult problem, complex, and, after all, merely tentative in the results, to assign the true value in such cases; not only for the obvious reason, that the powers of money have varied in different directions with regard to different objects, and in different degrees where the direction has on the whole continued the same, but because the very objects to be taken into computation are so indeterminate, and vary so much, not only as regards century and century, kingdom and kingdom, but also, even in the same century and the same kingdom, as

regards rank and rank. That which is a mere necessary to one, is a luxurious superfluity to another. And, in order to ascertain these differences, it is an indispensable qualification to have studied the habits and customs of the several classes concerned, together with the variations of those habits and customs.

Regard for Womanhood in England.—Page 41.

Never was the *esse quam videri* in any point more strongly discriminated than in this very point of gallantry to the female sex, as between England and France. In France, the verbal homage to woman is so excessive as to betray its real purpose,—viz. that it is a mask for secret contempt. In England, little is *said;* but, in the mean time, we allow our sovereign ruler to be a woman; which in France is impossible. Even that fact is of some importance, but less so than what follows. In every country whatsoever, if any principle has a deep root in the moral feelings of the people, we may rely upon its showing itself, by a thousand evidences, amongst the very lowest ranks, and in their daily intercourse, and their *undress* manners. Now in England there is, and always has been, a manly feeling, most widely diffused, of unwillingness to see labours of a coarse order, or requiring muscular exertions, thrown upon women. Pauperism, amongst other evil effects, has sometimes locally disturbed this predominating sentiment of Englishmen; but never at any time with such depth as to kill the root of the old hereditary manliness. Sometimes at this day a gentleman, either from carelessness, or from over-ruling force of convenience, or from real defect of gallantry, will allow a female servant to carry his portmanteau for him; though, after all, that spectacle is a rare one. And everywhere women of all ages engage in the pleasant, nay elegant, labours of the hay field; but in Great Britain women are never suffered to mow, which is a most athletic and exhausting labour, nor to load a cart, nor to drive a plough or hold it. In France, on the other hand, before the Revolution (at which period the pseudo-homage, the lip-honour, was far more ostentatiously

professed towards the female sex than at present), a Frenchman of credit, and vouching for his statement by the whole weight of his name and personal responsibility (M. Simond, now an American citizen), records the following abominable scene as one of no uncommon occurrence: A woman was in some provinces yoked side by side with an ass to the plough or the harrow; and M. Simond protests that it excited no horror to see the driver distributing his lashes impartially between the woman and her brute yoke-fellow. So much for the wordy pomps of French gallantry. In England, we trust, and we believe, that any man, caught in such a situation, and in such an abuse of his power (supposing the case otherwise a possible one), would be killed on the spot.

Slander of Corporal Punishment.—Page 55.

In a little memoir of Milton, which the author of this article drew up some years ago for a public society, and which is printed in an abridged shape,* he took occasion to remark, that Dr Johnson, who was meanly anxious to revive the slander against Milton, as well as some others, had supposed Milton himself to have this flagellation in his mind, and indirectly to confess it, in one of his Latin poems, where, speaking of Cambridge, and declaring that he has no longer any pleasure in the thoughts of revisiting that university, he says,—

> "Nec duri libet usque minas perferre magistri,
> Cæteraque ingenio non subeunda meo."

This last line the malicious critic would translate—"And other things insufferable to a man of my temper." But as we then observed, *ingenium* is properly expressive of the *intellectual* constitution, whilst it is the *moral* constitution that suffers degradation from personal chastisement—the sense of honour, of personal dignity, of justice, &c. *Indoles* is the proper term for this latter idea, and in using the word *ingenium*, there cannot be a doubt that Milton alluded to the dry scholastic disputations, which were

* Works, vol. x. p. 79.

shocking and odious to his fine poetical genius. If, therefore, the vile story is still to be kept up in order to dishonour a great man, at any rate let it not in future be pretended that any countenance to such a slander can be drawn from the confessions of the poet himself.

Shakspeare's Station in Literature.—Page 71.

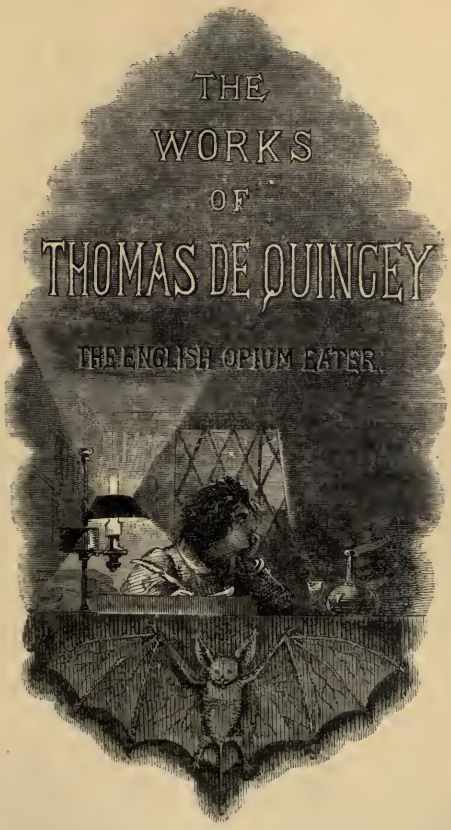
It will occur to many readers, that perhaps Homer may furnish the sole exception to this sweeping assertion: any *but* Homer is clearly and ludicrously below the level of the competition; but even Homer, "with his tail on (as the Scottish Highlanders say of their chieftains when belted by their ceremonial retinues), musters nothing like the force which *already* follows Shakspeare; and be it remembered, that Homer sleeps, and has long slept as a subject of criticism or commentary, while in Germany as well as England, and *now even in France*, the gathering of wits to the vast equipage of Shakspeare is advancing in an accelerated ratio. There is, in fact, a great delusion current upon this subject. Innumerable references to Homer, and brief critical remarks on this or that pretension of Homer, this or that scene, this or that passage, lie scattered over literature ancient and modern; but the express works dedicated to the separate service of Homer are, after all, not many. In Greek we have only the large Commentary of Eustathius, and the Scholia of Didymus, &c.; in French little or nothing before the prose translation of the seventeenth century, which Pope esteemed "elegant," and the skirmishings of Madame Dacier, La Motte, &c.; in English, besides the various translations and their prefaces (which, by the way, began as early as 1555), nothing of much importance until the elaborate preface of Pope to the Iliad, and his elaborate postscript to the Odyssey—nothing certainly before that, and very little indeed since that, except Wood's Essay on the Life and Genius of Homer. On the other hand, of the books written in illustration or investigation of Shakspeare, a very considerable library might be formed in England, and another in Germany.

Caliban.-- Page 80

Caliban has not yet been thoroughly fathomed. For all Shakspeare's great creations are like works of nature, subjects of unexhaustible study. It was this character of whom Charles I. and some of his ministers expressed such fervent admiration ; and, among other circumstances, most justly they admired the new language almost with which he is endowed, for the purpose of expressing his fiendish and yet carnal thoughts of hatred to his master. Caliban is evidently not meant for scorn, but for abomination mixed with fear and partial respect. He is purposely brought into contrast with the drunken Trinculo and Stephano, with an advantageous result. He is much more intellectual than either, uses a more elevated language, not disfigured by vulgarisms, and is not liable to the low passion for plunder as they are. He is mortal, doubtless, as his "dam" (for Shakspeare will not call her mother) Sycorax. But he inherits from her such qualities of power as a witch could be supposed to bequeath. He trembles indeed before Prospero ; but that is, as we are to understand, through the moral superiority of Prospero in Christian wisdom ; for when he finds himself in the presence of dissolute and unprincipled men, he rises at once into the dignity of intellectual power.

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MAN'S EXCELLENCY A CAUSE OF PRAISE AND THANKFULNESS TO GOD.

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A SERMON

PREACHED AT STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

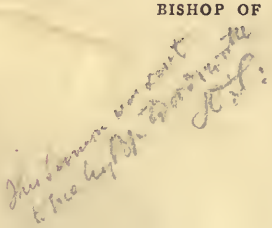
ON

SUNDAY, APRIL 24, 1864.

BY

CHARLES WORDSWORTH, D.C.L.

BISHOP OF ST. ANDREWS.



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NEW-STREET SQUARE

PSALM CXLV. 10.

*All Thy works praise Thee, O Lord; and Thy saints give thanks unto Thee.**

—♦—

WHEN the Psalmist tells us, as in this text, that all the works of God praise their Creator, he means that by their beauty and excellency they testify to His skill and power; but he also means that, to speak generally, they severally obey the laws which He has imposed upon them; and such obedience, it may be said, is the higher praise. Thus the heavenly bodies praise God not only by the lustre with which they shine, but still more by the order which they keep among themselves—by the steadfastness with which those that are fixed occupy their allotted stations, and by the regularity with which those that move fulfil each of them its appointed course. The waters of the sea praise

* This is the Prayer-book version. In our Bible translation, as representing the Hebrew original more closely, the verbs are in the *future tense*, signifying both *duty* and *custom*—'shall praise,' 'shall bless.' In the Septuagint and in the Vulgate they are in the *imperative mood*.

God, not only by the purity of the element of which they are composed, but still more by the obedient ebbing and flowing of their tide, and by the billows which they roll, or the calm which they put on, according to His * word. The trees of the wood and the flowers of the field have their forms, their colours, their fruit, their fragrance, by which they praise their Maker; but they praise Him still more by dutifully relinquishing or re-assuming these at the times and the seasons which He ordains. But all such praise, we know, is defective in one grand respect. It represents a passive reflexion of the Creator's will, not the active independent working of the creature's heart. Consequently, it can have no moral worth. Man alone, the lord of creation, can perfect his Creator's praise, because he alone can give or withhold it; he alone has power to obey, or disobey, at his own will. And yet not absolutely so. Praise God we must, whether we will or no, to *some* extent. 'Fearfully and wonderfully † made' in the mechanism of our *bodies*, and still more in the constitution and faculties of our *minds*—both of which, in the unconsciousness with which they perform many of their functions, partake of the nature of irrational things—we cannot do otherwise than show forth the praises of Him who has so marvellously made and so beneficently

* See Psalm cxlviii. 8. † See Psalm cxxxix. 13.

endowed us. But the perfection of our praise lies in the obedience of the reason and of the will. If this be withheld, all is marred. Our praise, which ought to rise highest in creation—next to that of the angelic hosts—falls below the praise, not only of the unreasoning brutes, but of the senseless trees, of the winds and waves; falls below the praise, I will not say of the stars of heaven, but of the stocks and stones of the earth.

But there is a second proposition in this text, which further states that 'all the saints,' or true servants of God, 'give thanks unto Him;' that is, they give Him thanks for all this order and excellency of creation, to which I have referred. We cannot suppose that there is any consciousness of its own excellency, of its own obedience, or any appreciation of the excellency and obedience in others, on the part of the heavenly bodies, or of the productions of the earth; and therefore a poet, in the true spirit of a poet, might be allowed to breathe the wish,

> Would that the little flowers that grow, could live
> Conscious of half the pleasure that they give! *

But in man, in ourselves, my brethren, we know there exists the faculty of such appreciation, of such a consciousness. We have the power of admiring and rejoicing over the excellency and the

* See *Memoirs of Wordsworth*, vol. ii. p. 451.

order of all God's works. We know, moreover, that if not made for us and for our use alone, yet they are formed, and commanded to minister, for our gratification; no less than we ourselves have been created for our own happiness. But our admiration and our joy are not to terminate in the works themselves. This would be idolatry. No! they are to look through the works in order that they may rest upon Him who made, upon Him who gave them. As I am a work of God, and as I am a man, I cannot do otherwise than praise my Maker by the body and by the mind which He has given me. As I am a Christian man, living in the light of revealed truth, it is my duty to bless Him, not only for this body and this mind which I possess, but for all that He has caused to minister to my enjoyment; for the creation in the midst of which He has placed me; for the excellency and the beauty, the order and the harmony, of all that I behold; and, above all, I am bound to bless Him for my fellow-men, in proportion as they prompt and assist me to magnify my Creator, by the contemplation of their excellencies, and by the use they make of the gifts which He has bestowed upon them.

It will be obvious to you, my brethren, that my design in the remarks now offered has been to bring this text to bear upon an event which is felt to be of national, nay, of world-wide importance, and in which every one who hears me cannot but take an

especial interest. We are wont to speak of the works of Shakspeare; but never, never let us forget that the author of those works was himself a work of God. And if as men we naturally feel, and desire to express, a greater interest in the excellency of a fellow-man than in that of any other of God's works, however fair and beautiful, however majestic, or however huge and stupendous; yet, in order to render such interest not only innocent and rational, but in the highest degree pleasurable and beneficial to ourselves, we shall seek to elevate it to the point of view which I have already endeavoured to mark out: in honouring our great poet, we shall be led to magnify God in him, as a truly divine and matchless work; and not only so, but to bless God for him, as an inestimably precious and most glorious gift.

It may be desirable, however, before I proceed further, to say a few words in anticipation of a scruple which may occur to some in regard to the professed character and purpose of this discourse.

I feel then, my brethren, and you, I am sure, will feel with me, that the Church is no proper place for panegyric, save in honour of Him who is above all praise. Nor is there, perhaps, in the whole Bible, one single word which would lead us to glorify and extol intellectual superiority merely as such. And yet there is *that* in the inspired volume which teaches us to recognise *all* pre-eminence and magistracy over others as an especial ordinance and gift

of God; and again, there is *that* which teaches us that *all* conquest over temptation, and particularly over the temptation of wealth, in the cause of God, is a subject not only fit and desirable for man to contemplate at all times and in every place, but pleasing also to the holy angels, and to God Himself. But what magistracy, what sovereignty among men is so powerful in its effects, for good or for evil, as the sovereignty of mind? What conqueror over the temptations of wealth is so worthy of our contemplation as he who, possessing the treasures of unrivalled genius, has used them, not to serve his own pride, or vanity, or aggrandisement, but to promote the cause of truth and godliness? The Church of Christ has ever considered it a part of true piety to give thanks for kings and governors; and rich men have received from the gratitude of posterity a religious commemoration of the benefits which their charity has bestowed. It needs, therefore, no apology if something be said even in this sacred place respecting one whom God raised up three centuries ago from among the inhabitants of the neighbouring town, to be at once a mighty prince over the thoughts of men, through the pre-eminence of his intellectual powers; and through the richness of his genius a munificent benefactor, for ages upon ages, not to his own country and nation only, but to the world at large.

And as this place, though consecrated to God's

glory, is not unsuitable, so neither is the time, even of this holy day, at all improper for such a commemoration. For what is it that every Christian Sabbath is designed most especially to bring home to our thoughts and meditations? It is the resting of the Creator after the making of all His works, man included; but it is also the rising of Christ out of the grave, and His sending down the Holy Spirit upon His Church, both as on this day;—in other words, it is not only the creation, but the redemption and the sanctification of man. And what would the first, our creation, have availed us unless it had been followed by these other two? What satisfaction could we have had in thinking of ourselves or of our fellow-men? what real or lasting pleasure could we have enjoyed in contemplating the very best and noblest of mankind, unless it had been permitted us to regard him, not only as a work of God, but as a work, not created for nothingness, or for woe, but redeemed and sanctified for an immortality of happiness through Jesus Christ?

Entering then upon the subject before us with no mistrust, I shall, in the first place, be fully justified, I believe, in assuming that this celebration would not have taken place—would not certainly have been promoted so generally, or conducted on so grand a scale—unless it had been commonly felt that the works of Shakspeare are plainly on the

right side; the side of what is true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report—in a word, on the side of virtue and of true religion. Nor can it be said, in this case at least, that the popular voice has erred. It is in accordance with the voice of one whose testimony upon such a point will be accepted as of the highest and most unquestionable authority; I allude to the revered author of the *Christian Year*.* In the Lectures which he delivered as Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford, and which were published twenty years ago, while specifying the notes or characteristics by which poets of the first rank are to be discerned, the distinguishing mark which he requires, first of all, is CONSISTENCY. The first-class Poet, he remarks, is *throughout consistent, and in harmony with himself.* And where does the critic look for his examples in proof of this proposition? He brings forward two poets, who flourished in the same, that is our own, country, and at the same time. First, he produces Spenser, in whom he sees *everywhere sustained the same very form and look of true Nobility*; and next he produces Shakspeare. We need not wonder that the former

* And who must also be mentioned as the Editor of the *Works of Hooker*, that great contemporary of Shakspeare, whose name shines out among our theologians with a kindred, and I had almost said not inferior, light to that of Shakspeare among our poets, and that of Lord Bacon among our philosophers. See below, p. 17.

should have been chosen; but when we consider the disadvantage under which a dramatic poet lies in regard to a point like this, we may feel well assured that no such example would have been appealed to except from the conviction that it was singularly a just one. And this consistency of character which, as a first and most decisive test, assigns our poet to the highest rank, in what is it to be found? It is to be found in *the universal impression which his works convey*. And for this the Lecturer confidently appeals to the memory of his hearers. 'Recollect,' says he, 'I beseech you, how you each felt when you read those plays for the first time. Do you not remember that all along, as the drama proceeded, you were led to take the part of whatever good and worthy characters it contained; and more especially, when you reached the end and closed the book, you felt that your inmost heart had received a spur, which was calculated to urge you on to virtue; and to virtue, not merely such as is apt, without much reality, to warm and excite the feelings of the young, but such as consists in the actual practice of a stricter, more pure, more upright, more industrious, more religious life? And as for the passages of a coarser sort, here and there to be met with in those plays, any one may perceive that they are to be attributed, in part, not to the author but to the age in which he lived; and partly they were introduced as slaves

in a state of intoxication were introduced into the presence of the Spartan youth—to serve as warnings and create disgust. We need not hesitate, therefore, to conclude *illum Virtuti ex animo favisse*—that he favoured virtue from his very soul; more especially when we consider how widely different is the case with most of his contemporaries, who devoted themselves, as he did, to writing for the stage.' *

This, my brethren, is lofty commendation; and I should not have rehearsed it here unless I had been persuaded that it is just. Nor do I scruple to consent to the still higher praise which the same unexceptionable † judge has bestowed in another part of his work upon the same two poets whom I just now named; and which brings the mention of them still more closely within the legitimate range of a discourse, delivered upon this holy day, and in this

* 'Memoriâ repetatis, oro, quæ cuique vestrum fuerit animi sententia, fabulas istas primâ vice perlegenti. Nonne, cùm totius Poematis decursu, proborum vos ac piorum, si qui erant, partes suscipere meministis; tum præcipue cùm ventum erat ad *plaudite* quasi stimulos Virtutis in animo relictos sentire? neque ejus modò Virtutis, quæ specie quâdam et fervore juvenum corda commovere valeat, verùm etiam severioris hujus, castimoniæ, fidei, industriæ, pietatis? Ut facile quis intelligere possit quæ aliquando subturpicula intexuntur, partim sæculi esse, non Scriptoris; partim ut ebrios Laconicis pueris, tanquam odiosa ac vitanda proponi. *Ergo illum ex animo Virtuti favisse non est cur dubitemus*: cùm præsertim plerique eorum, qui tunc scenicis dabant operam, in alia omnia abire consueverint.'—*Prælectiones Academicæ Oxonii habitæ* a Joanne Keble, A.M., Oxon. 1844, vol. i. p. 58 sq.

† 'Where could I find a more trustworthy judge?' asks the Poet Wordsworth (*Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 410), speaking of Mr. Keble.

sacred place. 'Not only,' he says, 'did they measure everything by a certain innate sense of what is virtuous and becoming; not only did they teach to hate all profaneness, but they trained and exercised men's minds to virtue and religion, inasmuch as each of them is wont to refer all things which the eye beholds to the heavenly and the true, whether as occurring in the actions of men and upon the stage of life, or as seen in the glorious spectacle everywhere presented in the heavens and the earth; precisely as does the Church Catholic, only, as it is her province to do, in a manner mystical and divine. And hence it is that the poetry we speak of led the way, as I believe, to sounder views even upon sacred things, and to juster sentiments concerning God himself.'*

But there is another consciousness no less generally felt, which has tended to give to this celebration its comprehensive character. I mean the consciousness of our poet's nationality. Like Homer to the Greeks, he is *the poet* of us English-

* 'Illi rem quamque metiebantur innato quodam honesti et decori sensu. . . Neque verò illud solum edocuerant nobilia carmina, odisse profanos, sed multo magis ad pietatem et religionem exercuerant animos; siquidem omnia quæ oculis cernuntur referre solet uterque scriptor ad cœlestia et vera, sive ea versentur in scenâ et actione hominum, sive in pulcherrimo cœli ac terrarum aspectu: quod idem egit semper Ecclesia Catholica, suo tamen more, mystico quodam et excelso. Proinde ex hâc quoque parte præiïsse dixerim saniori de Deo sententiæ segetem illam egregiorum carminum.'—*Ibid.* ii. 813.

men.* And as we look for no better, so we desire no other. We feel—even foreigners† have felt—that the verse of Shakspeare, more than that of any other of our poets,

> 'flowed
> From the clear spring of a true English heart.'

And while he is pre-eminently *our poet* in other respects, which I forbear to mention, lest I should seem to vaunt in flattery to our national pride, he is so most especially in that we are a *domestic nation*. In this respect he may remind us of those well-known lines, in which one of the most melodious of our British birds, the common skylark, is addressed :—

> Type of the wise who soar, but never roam,
> True to the kindred points of heaven and home!

If ever there was a man to whom the description in this latter verse might justly be applied, it is William Shakspeare.‡ How 'true' he was to 'heaven,' under circumstances in which his fidelity

* 'Anglorum κατ' ἐξοχήν vates jure nominatus.'—*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 271.

† For instance, Augustus W. Schlegel. See his *Lectures on Dramatic Literature*, vol. i. p. 102.

‡ He himself has compared himself to the skylark in his 29th sonnet :—

> 'Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee—and then my state
> (Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth) *sings hymns at heaven's gate.*'

must have been tried as by fire, I have already shown. Nor was he less 'true to home.' When he left this place in which he had been born; when he went up to the great city,

> 'to pour upon the world
> A flood of harmony,'

such as it has never heard either before or since; still he returned periodically, year by year,* to this self-same spot; still, when the effort had been made, which his own support and the support of his family rendered necessary, time after time, he dropped, as it were, again into this his nest, to refresh himself for renewed exertions—

> 'Those quivering wings composed, that music still!'

And when (thanks to the good providence of God, which blessed his faithfulness) the necessity for those exertions ceased, he had no thought, it would appear, or desire of happiness, apart from or beyond these same associations: all his ambition was still to retire into the same bosom of his family; to wander still in these same fields; to worship still in this same church; and eventually to be gathered to his own, where his own might follow him in the same resting-place, lying side by side within the precincts of these hallowed walls.

And now, my brethren, I think it may be said

* 'He was wont to go to his native country once a yeare.'—*Aubrey MSS.*

we see the first rude outline of a character which, in paying honour to the man, we shall do well to contemplate. For it is not (let me repeat), it is not merely as a poet, or even as a poet who wrote, in a high and genuine sense of the word, religiously, but as a man, a Christian man, that we, as a congregation of Christians, should be content to honour Shakspeare. Let us see, then, what he was as such. Undazzled by the world, and coveting nothing which the world can give, we find him indifferent to the fate even of the produce of his own immortal mind,* and throwing his pearls, with † child-like simplicity, into the lap of time, as if unconscious of their amazing worth. A man of a less simple or less sober temper, after he had attained to prosperity and to fame, would never have chosen, when not yet fifty years old, to settle down for the remainder of his days, in rural quietude, and in the place which had known him, not only in obscurity, but in poverty and distress. But seeking, as he did, to shun rather than to court distinction, the fact that 'a prophet is not without honour save in his own country and in his own house,' ‡ tended rather to recommend this choice to him the more;—happy, if only he might be allowed to study nature, and to cultivate his own moral being, in order that he might be 'ripe,' ‡ in God's good time—which

* See below, p. 26, note. † Matt. xiii. 37.

‡ See below, page 23, note.

proved to be a very early time—might be 'ripe,'* I say, for being gathered into a far more joyful and more glorious abode.†

But there is a further point of view, which combines in one the poet and the man, and which, if we look with a wise and patriotic interest upon the destinies of our country and of the human race, cannot fail to raise him still higher in our esteem. Born within four years after Francis Bacon, that gigantic intellect, and worthy to be so reckoned in an age of giants (such was the bounty of God towards our land and people in the first half-century after the Reformation!), it was, shall I say, the *vocation* of William Shakspeare to live and to write as if *protesting* against the undue claims of that physical philosophy which received a new life from the genius of Bacon, and against the evils to which an excessive cultivation of it will be apt to lead. It is impossible to calculate how much we owe to our Poet on this account. We are pre-eminently a *practical*, and are becoming more and more a *mechanical* nation; and in proportion as we become

* See *On Shakspeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible*, p. 246.

† Dr. Drake has well remarked:—'Who shall blame what, from our knowledge of the man, we may justly conceive to have been his predominating motive [for retirement], the hope that in the bosom of rural peace, aloof from the dissipations and seductions of the stage, he might the better prepare for that event which awaits us all, and *which talents such as his were can only, from the magnitude of the trust*, render more awfully responsible?'—*Shakspeare and his Times*, vol. ii. p. 603.

so, the works of Shakspeare will be to us more and more invaluable. Not that there is to be found in his pages any unworthy jealousy of the powers which physical studies are calculated to evoke, or of the triumphs which, as time rolled on, they might be expected to achieve. Far otherwise. Not that he has betrayed any faithless fear of the progress of science, or of the activity of the human intellect to whatever subjects it might be applied. No; to him

> *Ignorance* is the curse of God;
> *Knowledge*, the wing wherewith we fly to heaven.*

But what is there in those pages? There is the very antidote we need to guard and to strengthen our moral system against the prevailing epidemic—the epidemic which has arisen out of devotion to mechanical pursuits, and to the study of material phenomena, in relation to the luxuries and conveniences of life. On the one hand, there is everything to refine, to elevate, to enlarge; on the other hand, there is nothing to make us impatient of acquiescence in *imperfect* knowledge, which is a necessary condition of our existence here. In a word, Shakspeare, more than any other writer in our native tongue, gives to Englishmen, who are debarred, as he himself had been, from the higher classical education, what such an education gives

* *K. Henry VI., 2nd Part*, Act iv. Sc. 7.

still more eminently to those who have enjoyed it, and turned it to its full account. Debarred, I say, he himself had been from direct access to the great intellectual treasuries of Greece and Rome. And yet, how much of the highest and purest sentiment, how many of the noblest thoughts and images, for which the best authors of antiquity are distinguished, lie scattered also over the pages of his works; just as in the vegetable world, specimens of the same plants have been found growing in widely distant regions of the globe, between which no certain channel of communication has been known to exist!

It has been made a frequent subject of complaint that so little has come down to us respecting our Poet's life. For my own part, however, I am inclined to doubt whether it would be desirable for us to be more fully informed concerning it than we actually are. His personal existence can never, by the utmost hardihood of critical scepticism, be—as that of Homer has been—doubted of, and explained away. We know the day of his baptism, and the day of his death.* We know the names of his parents, of his wife, of his children. We know the circumstances from which we feel justified in pronouncing him to have been a man strong in domestic, strong in local attachments. We are sure that he ate, drank, and slept like other men.

* The precise day of his birth is uncertain. See Mr. Dyce's *Life of Shakspeare*, p. 24 sq.

We are no less sure that he prayed, that he read his Bible, that he came to church. We know that he lost (for this world) his only son,* when that son was but a boy in his twelfth year: and we can imagine what a sore affliction this loss must have been to a parent of such affection, such sensibility, such tenderness; we can imagine how, like David, while the child was yet alive, he fasted and prayed, if peradventure he might be spared; and how, like David too, when the child was gone, he suffered not the chastisement to bereave him of his natural cheerfulness, through the excellency of his faith. In the play † which he wrote in *that same year*, as some have supposed, or, as others, *two years later*, who can doubt that he was thinking of his own lost son, when the Lady Constance is made to utter that affecting speech?—

> Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
> Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me;
> Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
> Remembers me of all his gracious parts.

Or again, who will not feel that he gave expression

* In my recently published volume *On Shakspeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible*, p. 173, I have expressed myself in forgetfulness of this fact, that Shakspeare's only *son* Hamnet died in 1596, twenty years *before* his father. The truth of the sentiment, however, in that place is not affected by the inaccuracy, as both his *daughters* survived him; and the fact itself had been correctly stated in p. 169.

† *K. John*, written, according to Mr. Malone, in 1596, or, according to Mr. Chalmers, in 1598. See Act. iii. Sc. 4.

to his own belief, when the same Lady Constance addresses the Pope's Legate?—

> Father Cardinal, I have heard you say
> That we shall see and know our friends in heaven:
> If that be true, *I shall see my boy again.*

Moreover, we know his 'unwearied diligence'* and the blessing which attended it. We know how he has written. What truth has he not taught? What duty has he not enforced? What relation of life, and of living things, rational or irrational, has he not illustrated? How has he looked *through* nature, and above all into the heart of man, with the intuitive knowledge with which the skilful artisan inspects the mechanism of the watch which he himself has made!

And knowing these things, we know enough to teach us how little true greatness is dependent upon external circumstances. We know enough to shame us, if any of us should complain of the difficulties and disadvantages in which God has placed him. The theatre itself, which received those masterpieces of Shakspeare's genius, what was it but a hovel, all rude, and shapeless, and unadorned? The father of Shakspeare was so little able to instruct his son, that he could not so much as write his own name; so little able to advance his son that, for a time, he could not even appear in this church on the Lord's day, from liability to arrest for debt. Yet

* Mr. Dyce's *Life*, p. 52.

Shakspeare lived to make the stage worthy of the utmost contrivance and embellishment of art. Shakspeare lived to relieve his father from distress in his old age. Shakspeare lived to become a teacher of the world, so long as time shall last. And, what deserves to be commemorated more especially in this place, Shakspeare lived to receive, as a benefactor, the blessings of the poor, not forgetting them, we may be sure, while he lived, inasmuch as he remembered them when he died.*

But there is still one circumstance in our Poet's life which has not yet been noticed, and which we discover from documentary evidence that admits of no question. Twelve years after it had pleased God to take from him his only son, he became godfather to the new-born son of another,† a relationship which he also remembers, and acknowledges by a gift, in his last will. This is a fact which, in the eye of a minister of the Church, cannot but possess peculiar interest. Others, when they visit our Poet's birthplace, will delight themselves by the fancied vision of his appearance as he wandered at will among these pleasant fields; as he looked, and moralised, upon that flowing stream; as, at this season of the year, he would watch the budding foliage, and welcome the returning flowers; as he stood basking himself in the noontide sun, or

* See his last will.

† William Walker, baptised at Stratford, Oct. 16, 1608.

lay reposing in the evening shade. Let it be permitted to the preacher of the Gospel to imagine him as he knelt by that sacred font; to hear him as he listened and responded to the Articles of the Christian Faith in the name of that little child—'All this I steadfastly believe.' Nor can we doubt, my brethren, for a moment, but that he knew and perceived in his inmost soul what those things meant. Rather we must suppose that the author of *Othello*, of *Hamlet*, of *Macbeth*, when he heard and accepted that venerable formulary and deposit of saving truth, fathomed somewhat of its exceeding depth, beyond what it is permitted to us to reach—and all the more, because, giant as he was in intellectual strength, he himself had the heart and simplicity of a child.* Yes; and he felt, in relation to the time, the place, and circumstances of that solemn ministration, what a brother poet has since expressed:

> Here, should vain thoughts outspread their wings, and fly
> To meet the coming hours of festal mirth,
> The tombs—which hear and answer that brief cry,
> The infant's notice of his second birth—
> Recall the wandering soul to sympathy
> With what man hopes from heaven, yet fears from earth.

He felt in relation to the responsibilities which he had taken upon himself—

> Shame, if the consecrated vow be found
> An idle form, the word an empty sound!

* 'As if unconscious of his superiority, he was as open and unassuming as a child.'—Schlegel's *Lectures*, vol. ii. p. 138.

And now, ere I conclude this discourse, let me invite you to pass on for a moment from the font into the sanctuary, to the condition of which, in an architectural point of view, your attention has been already called. If the great Roman orator, when he visited Syracuse, felt and expressed an especial interest in the spot where the tomb of Archimedes* was to be found; if he caused it to be rescued from neglect, and the ground where it stood to be opened out and cleared from the unseemly upgrowth of weeds and briars which at once hid and disfigured it; surely it may be hoped that the numerous and distinguished company, not only of our fellow-countrymen but of foreigners, who are visiting Stratford on this occasion, will not show less concern for the consecrated edifice which contains the monument of Shakspeare; will desire to render it still more worthy than it is both of him and of the House of God. As pilgrims to this shrine of Christian genius, they will wish, I am sure, to

* See Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* lib. v. c. 23. The extravagant praise which Silius Italicus (*Punic.* lib. xiv. 341 sqq.) gives to Archimedes might be applied far more justly to Shakspeare :—

> Vir *Stratfordiacis* decus immortale colonis,
> Ingenio facilè ante omnes telluris alumnos,
> Nudus opus, sed cui cœlum terræque paterent.

And so, too, might the similar, but far more elegant compliment, which Lucretius (iii. 1056 sq.) had before paid to Epicurus :—

> Qui genus humanum ingenio superavit, et omnes
> Restrinxit, stellas exortus uti aerius Sol.

make some thank-offering—and what fitter offering could they make than that which is requested at their hands?—to make, I say, some thank-offering 'to the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good gift, and every perfect gift.'* They will wish to testify that as 'saints' and servants of God, they do indeed 'bless' and 'give thanks' to Him for the giving to us and to mankind the departed brother whom we now commemorate, because his works do indeed 'praise God,' by their intellectual excellency, and by their moral worth: and because, being what they are, they form a gift of inestimable value to ourselves. It is true he is to all men the poet of humanity, master of our nature in its weakness and in its strength; and, as such, to be honoured and admired of all; but he is, moreover, as I have said, to us Englishmen the national, the domestic Poet, whom we love as we love our own homes. Above all, he is one of whom, judged of in the character up to which he grew, the Church of Christ has no need to be ashamed; —because in him, *as a poet*, Poetry has fulfilled every purpose for which in the mercy of God she was given to our fallen race as, next to Revelation, His most precious boon; and because

* See the Epistle for the day, from St. James i. 17. The original would seem to mean: *Every giving that is good* (for this life), *and every perfect gift* (in the life to come).

in him *as a man*, the Gospel has exemplified that truest element of the Christian character, of which it is written—and fulfilled as on this day—'Blessed are the meek,* for they shall inherit the earth.' And, therefore, though this tercentenary commemoration points confessedly to the *year* of his *birth*, yet it was the *day* † of his *death* which we celebrated yesterday; as the Church has ever been wont to celebrate not the birthday, but the death-day—as being the truer and more glorious nativity—of her saints and confessors.

But, my brethren, if, not having seen, we honour

* Our poet is well known as the '*honest* Shakspeare.' See *On his Knowledge and Use of the Bible*, p. 3. But he is also known as the meek, the gentle Shakspeare. See Prefatory Address to the first folio, supposed to have been written by Ben Jonson:—'As he was a happy imitator of nature, was a *most gentle* expresser of it; his *mind* and hand went together.' My honoured relative, the late Poet-Laureate, has remarked, 'I cannot account for Shakspeare's low estimate of his own writings'—compare above, p. 16—'except from the sublimity, the *superhumanity* of his genius' (see *Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 470). But may it not be accounted for from his *characteristic meekness*, which the same poet himself has elsewhere described, as

'The cherished bent
Of all the truly great, and all the innocent'?

At the same time it is to be remembered that Shakspeare, in his sonnets, frequently expresses himself as fully conscious that what he wrote would be read as long as time shall last. See Sonn. 18, 19, 63, 81, 101, 107. On the perplexing evidence of the sonnets, as bearing upon his moral character, see Dr. Drake's *Shakspeare and his Times*, vol. ii. p. 72 sq., and compare Mr. C. Knight's *Studies of Shakspeare*, p. 460 and p. 484 sq.

† See above, p. 19 note.

and we love our departed brother for his works' sake, how greatly—how infinitely—more ought we to love and to bless HIM Who made our brother what he was, and gave him to us; not to become (as human genius, alas! has sometimes proved) an instrument of desolation, but of culture, of refreshment, of fruitfulness; not to resemble the full but faithless reservoir, which, when it has burst its barriers, carries death and ruin in its course, but the varying, yet ever-faithful Nile; which, while it is the grandest of all rivers, and while it is subject no less than the feeblest rivulet to the law which regulates its boundless floods, is at the same time the most beneficent in its influence, and the sweetest in its taste. And as in the surface of that majestic stream the traveller sees a true reflection of the heavens which are above his head, so in the poetry of Shakspeare the reader may behold no uncertain image of the word of God; may behold shining in its depths the starlike truths of the Bible; may behold and may adore the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, overclouded, we must confess, from time to time, with the mists of earth, but still shedding around His divine rays, and lighting up all with faith and hope, with love and joy.

NOTE.

THE Author desires to be permitted to refer here to a statement made by him somewhat too broadly in his recent publication *On Shakspeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible*. At p. 299 he has borrowed the words of Johnson (*Preface*, p. 103) to the effect that 'our Poet's plays were written, and *at first printed, in one unbroken continuity*;' that is, without being divided into Acts and Scenes: and he has added, 'Othello being, it is said, the only exception;' where he alludes to the words of Mr. Capell's *Introduction*, p. 122, 'Division of Acts and Scenes they have none, Othello only excepted, which is divided into Acts.' But Mr. Capell is there speaking of *only fourteen* of the Plays, viz. those printed in quarto, before the appearance of the first folio; and he has shown elsewhere that in that edition *seventeen* of the Plays were divided into *Acts and Scenes*; *eight* were divided into *Acts only*; while only *eleven* were printed 'in one unbroken continuity;' so that no more than a small proportion of the whole remained to be divided by Mr. Rowe, in 1709. In short, the Author was misled—and he is glad to avail himself of this early opportunity to correct the error—by the authority of Dr. Johnson, who appears to have drawn his conclusion too hastily, from an insufficient examination of the whole case.

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